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ROMANCE

A PLAY

by

EDWARD SHELDON

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ROMANCE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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TORONTO

DORIS KEANE AS LA CAVALLINI

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ROMANCE

BY

EDWARD SHELDON

AUTHOR OF "THE NIGGER"

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1914

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GREAT BRITAIN

PS
3537
H62
R6
1914

TO
D. K.

ROMANCE

"My thoughts at the end of the long, long day
Fly over the hills and far away—"

CHARACTERS

In the Prologue and Epilogue:

Bishop Armstrong
Harry, Suzette } *his grandchildren*

In the Story:

Thomas Armstrong, *Rector of St. Giles*
Cornelius Van Tuyl, *of Van Tuyl & Co., Bankers*
Susan Van Tuyl, *his niece*
Miss Armstrong, *the Rector's aunt*
Mrs. Rutherford
Mrs. Frothingham
Miss Frothingham
Mrs. Gray
Miss Snyder
Mr. Fred Livingstone
Mr. Harry Putnam
Signora Vannucci
Baptiste
Louis
Francois
Eugene
Adolph
Servant at Mr. Van Tuyl's
Butler at the Rectory
Mme. Margherita Cavallini

THE PROLOGUE: *The Bishop's library in his house on Washington Square. New Year's Eve. About ten o'clock.*

THE STORY: *Act I. Over forty years ago. At Cornelius Van Tuyl's house, — 58, Fifth Avenue. A November evening.*

Act II. The study in the Rectory of St. Giles', East 8th Street. The afternoon of New Year's Eve.

Act III. Late that night. Mme. Cavallini's apartments in the Brevoort House. After her farewell appearance as "Mignon."

THE EPILOGUE: *The Bishop's library again. Midnight.*

PLACE: *New York.* TIME: *Now and the 1860's.*

Produced at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York, on Monday, February 10th, 1913, with the following cast:

THE CHARACTERS IN THE PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUE

BISHOP ARMSTRONG . . . . . *William Courtenay*
HARRY . . . . . *William Raymond*
SUZETTE . . . . . *Louise Seymour*

THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

THOMAS ARMSTRONG . . . . . *William Courtenay*
CORNELIUS VAN TUYL . . . . . *A. E. Anson*
SUSAN VAN TUYL . . . . . *Gladys Wynne*
MISS ARMSTRONG. . . . . *Grace Henderson*
MRS. RUTHERFORD . . . . . *Mrs. Charles de Kay*
MRS. FROTHINGHAM . . . . . *Edith Hinkle*
MISS FROTHINGHAM . . . . . *Claiborne Foster*
MRS. GRAY . . . . . *Dora Manor*
MISS SNYDER . . . . . *Mary Forbes*
MR. FRED LIVINGSTONE . . . . . *Paul Gordon*
MR. HARRY PUTNAM . . . . . *George Le Soir*
SIGNORA VANNUCCI . . . . . *Gilda Varesi*
BAPTISTE . . . . . *Paul Gordon*
LOUIS . . . . . *Hermann Nagel*
FRANÇOIS . . . . . *Yorke Erskine*
EUGENE . . . . . *Alexander Herbert*
ADOLPH . . . . . *Hermann Gerold*
SERVANT AT MR. VAN TUYL'S . . . . . *M. Morton*
BUTLER AT THE RECTORY . . . . . *Harry Georgnette*
MME. MARGHERITA CAVALLINI . . . . *Doris Keane*

ROMANCE

PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE

SCENE: *The Bishop's library in Washington Square. At right are two windows, with heavy curtains drawn. At left is a large fireplace, with a white marble mantel. At back is the door leading to the rest of the house. There are high bookcases, running up to the ceiling, set in both walls wherever there is any space. In a corner at back stands a Victrola, of sober mahogany. Before the fireplace, half facing the audience, is the Bishop's big armchair. At right, is a big mahogany table-desk, arranged in an orderly way with electric lamp, telephone, desk-furniture, books, memoranda, files, etc. The chair is behind it, between the windows. The whole room is one of quiet dignity, — slightly old-fashioned in effect, and very comfortable.*

It is night. The lamp on the desk is turned on and there is a cheerful wood fire burning. In his armchair before the fire sits Bishop Armstrong. He is a charming, drily humorous old man of about seventy. Suzette, — a decided young woman of seventeen, — is sitting at the desk, reading aloud from the evening paper.

SUZETTE

[*Skimming over the headlines.*] "Regulation of Skyscrapers — Drastic Measures —" [*She yawns.*] "Borough President Gives to Board of Estimates the Report on Improvement." [*Looking up.*] Sounds dull, doesn't it?

THE BISHOP

No — but if you think so, try the next.

SUZETTE

[*Reading.*] "President in the West — Yesterday's Speech at Cheyenne" — Is that the way you pronounce it? — " Crops, Race Suicide, and Tariff Reform." [*As the noise of horns drifts in from the street.*] Oh, I do wish those boys would stop!

THE BISHOP

[*Philosophically.*] It's New Year's Eve.

SUZETTE

I know, but they needn't make such a fuss about it. [*Returning to her paper.*] The President talked two and a half columns and he looks dreadfully dull. Do you want me to read him? Now, grandpa, speak the truth! Wouldn't you much rather have me start the Victrola?

THE BISHOP

Well, my dear, perhaps I would. Where's Harry? He said he wanted to speak to me after dinner about something important.

SUZETTE

[*Busy with the Victrola.*] Oh, he just went out. He'll be back soon. [*The song begins.*] There, grandpa! Isn't that a splendid record?

THE BISHOP

[*Singing.*] Ta-ta-ta-ta! Yes — a very fine voice. Who is it?

SUZETTE

Tetrazzini.

THE BISHOP

Ah, you should have heard Patti sing this at the Academy in '72 — !

SUZETTE

Now grandpa, I can't help being young, and anyway I'm sure that Garden and Fremstad and Farrar are every bit as good as your Grisis and Pattis and Cavallinis. And as for Caruso — !

THE BISHOP

[*Softly.*] *I* have heard Mario! [*Humming again.*] Ta-ta-ta-ta! Now for the cadenza — [*He listens.*] Fair — quite fair! [*With a sigh.*] After all, there's no one like Verdi!

SUZETTE

Grandpa.

THE BISHOP

Yes, dear?

SUZETTE

[*Beguilingly.*] Which do you think would be more apt to melt you into a perfectly angelic, Bavarian-cream sort of mood — *O Parigi* from *Traviata* or the *Sextette* from *Lucia?*

THE BISHOP

I'm melted already. I'm just running over the side of the dish.

SUZETTE

Really? No, I think you need one more. I want you very, very soft. [*Picking out a fresh record.*] Oh, here's a brand-new Destinn! That'll do it!

THE BISHOP

What's the opera?

SUZETTE

[*Adjusting the record.*] Wait and see. [*The voice is heard.*] Do you remember it?

THE BISHOP

[*Looking away.*] Yes — yes, I remember — [*He rouses himself suddenly.*] Don't play that, Suzette. I know I'm foolish, but it makes me rather sad.

SUZETTE

[*Stopping the record.*] I thought you'd like it. It's from *Mignon.*

THE BISHOP

Yes, I know — but — [*In a different tone.*] Suppose we have a little Harry Lauder for a change?

SUZETTE

[*Adjusting the record.*] Grandpa, your taste in music is low. That's the only word. And I've tried so hard to uplift it. Just think of those wonderful Boston Symphony concerts I dragged you to last winter! And now I think you'd rather hear *I Love a Lassie* than Beethoven!

THE BISHOP

[*Tranquilly.*] I would indeed.

SUZETTE

And you a Bishop of the Episcopal Church! [*She starts the machine.*] There!

THE BISHOP

[*Leaning back in his chair and singing under his breath.*]

"I love a lassie,
A bonny Highland lassie —
She's the —"

SUZETTE

[*Coming and perching on the arm of his chair.*] Oh, grandpa, you *are* such a dear old — baby!

THE BISHOP

Yes, ma'am?

SUZETTE

And I know I bully you an awful lot. Don't I?

THE BISHOP

Well, I'm used to it!

SUZETTE

How horrid of you! Why, I don't bully you at all! Of course there *are* times when you *do* need disciplining —

THE BISHOP

[*Smiling.*] So your grandmother used to tell me.

SUZETTE

And you haven't anyone to do it except me.

THE BISHOP

I know.

SUZETTE

[*Softening.*] But I don't want you to think I'm a tyrant — especially tonight!

THE BISHOP

To what am I indebted for this holiday?

SUZETTE

Well, I've got something to tell you.

THE BISHOP

Yes?

SUZETTE

And I don't know whether or not you'll like it.

THE BISHOP

I like everything. It's my greatest fault!

SUZETTE

[*Suddenly smiling.*] Oh! oh! What about Wagner?

THE BISHOP

[*Firmly.*] Except Wagner. Yes, that's true — I can't stand Wagner!

SUZETTE

Well, I doubt if you can stand this, either.

THE BISHOP

Suppose you give me a try!

SUZETTE

All right. [*She stops the record.*] It's Harry.

THE BISHOP

I thought so.

SUZETTE

He's gone and done it.

THE BISHOP

What?

SUZETTE

[*All in a rush.*] I mean he hasn't *really* gone and done it, because he naturally can't do anything without *her* and *she* says she won't do a thing until she's met you and you've said it's all right, so that's why Harry wanted to speak to you tonight and you mustn't breathe one word about my telling you — you see, he's planning to do it all himself, but when he said he thought the shock would kill you and he'd be held up for "episcocide" — yes, that's what he called it! — I thought I'd better break it to you gently. [*Slight pause.*] Don't you think I've been wise, grandpa, to break it to you gently?

THE BISHOP

You haven't broken it at all, my dear. I don't know what you're talking about.

SUZETTE

Why, grandpa, I've just *told* you! Harry's engaged to a girl named Lucile Anderson!

THE BISHOP

Oh! I must be getting deaf. Dear me! And who is Lucile Anderson?

SUZETTE

Well, that's just it. Lucile's an — an artist.

THE BISHOP

You mean she paints?

SUZETTE

No, she doesn't exactly *paint.* You know, there're all kinds of artists, grandpa, and Lucile — well, Lucile's art is — er — a very beautiful art, it's the art of — er —

THE BISHOP

Well?

SUZETTE

The art of — er — impersonation on the stage. [*Slight pause.*]

THE BISHOP

In short, the young lady is an actress.

SUZETTE

Yes. [*Nervously.*] Well, it doesn't make any difference. Lots of nice girls are nowadays.

THE BISHOP

[*To himself.*] An actress — !

SUZETTE

[*Bursting out.*] But she's a perfect dear and her father was a well-known lawyer in Toronto, Canada, but he died and left her without a cent and her influence over Harry is very, *very* good and I'm sure you'll *love* her when you get to know her — I do, anyway, and I've only seen her four times — [*Coaxingly.*] Grandpa, say it's all right, please! Remember — it's our own Harry!

THE BISHOP

[*Drily.*] That's just what I am remembering, dear. He always did have very little sense!

SUZETTE

[*Reproachfully.*] Why, grandpa, he played quarter on the 'varsity! And you said yourself that took a lot of brains!

THE BISHOP

[*Smiling.*] Did I? Well, this proves I was mistaken.

SUZETTE

Oh, dear! I — [*Suddenly.*] Wait! I heard the front-door! That's Harry — ! [*She slips off the arm of his chair.*] Now remember! Don't you get me into trouble!

THE BISHOP

I won't!

SUZETTE

Promise?

THE BISHOP

Cross my heart and hope to die! [*Enter Harry. He is an attractive young man of about twenty-two or three — restless, young and impetuous. He wears a dinner-coat.*] Well! We'd almost given you up!

HARRY

[*Ill at ease.*] I had to make a call. Didn't Suzie tell you?

THE BISHOP

[*Tranquilly.*] Oh, yes, she said something or other. Well, what about our little chat?

HARRY

[*Nervously.*] Your — your rheumatism isn't bothering you too much, is it, sir? Tomorrow would —

THE BISHOP

Oh no! Suzie's played all my aches away with *Rigoletto* and *Trovatore.* I'm fit as a fiddle, my boy, so put another log on the fire and go ahead.

HARRY

All right, sir. [*He puts on the log, motioning the while for Suzette to leave.*]

SUZETTE

[*To the Bishop.*] I'll come in later and finish the *Post* to you before you go to bed. [*To Harry, in a lower voice.*] Don't worry! I've got him going!

HARRY

Thanks, old girl. [*She goes out.*]

HARRY

[*Turning resolutely to the Bishop.*] Grandfather, I have something I want to —

THE BISHOP

[*Gently.*] If you go to my desk, Harry, and open the second drawer from the top on the left-hand side, I think you'll see a box of cigars. [*As Harry obeys.*] Thank you. Can you find them? [*Harry returns with the box.*] Won't you have one? [*Harry shakes his head.*] I know they're not as good as yours, but I can't afford the *very* best brands.

HARRY

I don't feel like smoking now. Grandfather, I've come to you in order to —

THE BISHOP

[*Gently interrupting.*] Er — just one moment. I haven't any match.

HARRY

Oh Lord! Excuse me! [*He lights the Bishop's cigar.*] There! Now I want to tell you what's on my mind, grandfather. It's been there for some time and I — I —

THE BISHOP

Yes?

HARRY

[*Embarrassed.*] I think I ought to — to get it off.

THE BISHOP

Well?

HARRY

You see — it's this way. [*Pause.*]

THE BISHOP

[*Mildly.*] What way?

HARRY

Hang it, I don't know how to put the thing, but — but — [*Looking up and seeing the Bishop smiling at him.*] Well, I'll be — ! You're on! You've been on all the time!

THE BISHOP

Your intuition is overwhelming, Harry, — but it's correct. As you say, — I'm on. [*Pause.*]

HARRY

[*Wrathfully looking at door.*] I might have known no girl could keep a secret!

THE BISHOP

[*Hastily.*] It's my fault! I wrung it out of her! I kicked her shins! I squeezed her neck! I — I twisted her arm!

HARRY

[*Disgusted.*] And now you're making fun of me! Well —! [*He straightens up defiantly.*]

THE BISHOP

[*Suddenly tender.*] I'm not making fun of you, Harry.

HARRY

[*Uncomfortably.*] I meant to tell you myself about Lucile. I didn't want anybody else butting in.

THE BISHOP

Of course — I know. You must love her a great deal!

HARRY

[*Still a little sulkily.*] Well, I do.

THE BISHOP

And she's very pretty, isn't she?

HARRY

[*Brightening.*] Did Suzie tell you?

THE BISHOP

No — I just guessed — that's all.

HARRY

[*Enthusiastically.*] And she's awfully clever, too — acts like a streak — and she has just bunches of character! Why, when it comes down to it, she's ten times too good for me! She's just too wonderful for anything!

THE BISHOP

[*With a little smile.*] Of course she is — of course — of course.

HARRY

I met her at the Randalls' — you know, that painter fellow — and now she's all alone in a rotten boarding-house on Tenth Street and she has no work and her family are all dead — and so I really think I ought to marry her right off. Now don't you agree with me? [*Pause.*] Well? Don't you?

THE BISHOP

[*Rousing himself with an effort.*] I don't know, Harry. You see, you're so young — you're just beginning life, and you may change, and grow, my dear boy, there may come a time when you'll need more than any little actress can ever give you — [*Harry makes a movement.*] Oh, it's all right now, you love her — I know that! But are you quite sure, Harry, that you'll always love her just the way you love her now and nothing hidden in the future — or in the past — can ever shake your faith and beat you down and break your heart?

HARRY

I don't know what you mean.

THE BISHOP

You must be very, very sure, my boy — or else you're

not fair to yourself — and what's worse — I'm afraid you're not fair to *her*.

HARRY

[*Bursting out.*] Oh, what's the good of talking! I just knew it would be this way! There's absolutely no use trying to do things with my family — they're all alike — look at Uncle Thomas and Aunt Sarah and Cousin Ralph and the whole crowd of them — narrow, conventional, dry-as-dust! [*Turning away suddenly.*] If only dad and mummy were alive, *they'd* understand!

THE BISHOP

[*Hurt.*] Don't say things like that, Harry! You know I've done my best for Suzette and you.

HARRY

[*Penitent.*] I know you have. I didn't mean that, grandpa. But you see, it's a long time now since you've been young and I think it's sort of hard for you to remember back and realize what it's like and — *sympathize* with a fellow! [*Going on quickly.*] Oh, I know you're awfully wise and you can see clear through people and understand 'em *that* way, but this is different — I don't believe you ever felt the way I'm feeling now — and so — [*Gulping.*] Oh, well, there's no use going on. Thanks for trying, grandpa — I won't keep you up any longer. [*He is at the door ready to leave.*]

THE BISHOP

Where are you going?

HARRY

[*A trifle defiantly.*] I'm going to get married.

THE BISHOP

Tonight?

HARRY

Yes, we got the license this afternoon. [*Slight pause.*]

THE BISHOP

Come in, Harry, and shut the door.

HARRY

[*Doing so.*] What do you want?

THE BISHOP

You said I couldn't remember back and realize how one felt when one was young — and life was just a glorious chaos of passion and beauty and despair. Well, I do remember. Because no matter how old one grows, Harry, there are always some things that keep a little youth still burning in one's heart.

HARRY

I didn't mean to hurt you, grandpa.

THE BISHOP

You didn't, my dear boy. But you've made me think of something that I'd supposed I'd forgotten — it's so long ago since it came up in my mind. It's something I never told to anyone before — I used to think I never would. Oh, well — times change, and I didn't realize then I was to have a grandson just like you. I wonder, Harry, if you'll have time to wait and hear about it?

HARRY

[*Distrustfully.*] If you think it's anything that's going

to change my mind about Lucile, you might as well stop right here. [*As the Bishop rises with difficulty and goes slowly over to the desk.*] What is it, grandpa? Can't I get it?

THE BISHOP

[*Suddenly, with a sharp intake of breath.*] A-ah!

HARRY

[*Sympathetically.*] Your rheumatism, sir?

THE BISHOP

[*With a smile.*] Don't mention rheumatism now, my boy! [*He stands for a moment above the desk and shuts his eyes.*] I'm only twenty-eight years old! [*Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he unlocks a lower drawer and, after some fumbling, comes up with a small mahogany box which he lays on the desk before him.*]

THE BISHOP

Do you know what's in this little box?

HARRY

No, sir. What?

THE BISHOP

[*With a radiant smile.*] Romance, my boy — the perfume of romance!

HARRY

How — how do you mean, sir?

THE BISHOP

Look! [*He opens the box and takes out a little wisp of lace.*]

HARRY

[*Awed.*] What is it, grandpa? A handkerchief?

THE BISHOP

[*Nodding.*] A little handkerchief. [*He undoes it and discloses a few old flowers.*] White violets — [*He sniffs them, then smiles and shakes his head.*] They're dried and yellow now. Their sweetness is all gone. I'm an old man, Harry, but somehow — why, it seems like yesterday —

HARRY

[*Wonderingly.*] What, sir?

THE BISHOP

[*Turning out the desk-lamp, and crossing to his chair again, holding the flowers and handkerchief very carefully in his hands.*] Ah, that's what I'm going to tell you now! Sit down, my boy — [*As Harry obeys.*] Are you comfortable there? That's right! — Well, it was over forty years ago — forty years — dear me, how the time flies! — and I was the young Rector of St. Giles, you know. That was before I married your grandmother — God bless her! — although I'd known her nearly all my life. Well, Harry, one night — in November, it was — I went to an evening party at old Cornelius Van Tuyl's house and there in that kaleidoscope of jewels and flowers and crinolines the great adventure of my life began — [*And, as he speaks, from far away comes the sound of a quaint old polka, and Harry and the Bishop and the whole room melt into the dark. The music swells and the lights, blooming again from crystal chandeliers, reveal the living vision of the past.*]

ROMANCE

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE: *Evening reception at Mr. Cornelius Van Tuyl's house, about 1867. It is a small upstairs drawing-room. In the centre is the stairway leading to the rooms below. At left is the door to the library. In foreground, at right, there is a couch, turned slightly to face the audience. At its head stands a small, marble-topped table. At left of foreground is a tête-à-tête chair. A seat runs along the balustrade which encircles the staircase well. Lamps in the foreground shed a mellow light which contrasts with the brilliance reflected from the rooms below.*

The lights go up upon an animated scene. The little room is filled with people. At back, leaning on the balustrade which surrounds the well, stand two men-about-town, looking out over the rooms below. Near them are a young man and a girl, talking, laughing, and flirting. Another young man and a girl — she on his arm — cross the stage, chatting gaily. They turn, descend the staircase, and disappear. Mrs. Rutherford, — a rather pretty, affected woman, — is sitting on the couch at right. Beside her is Miss Susan Van Tuyl, a sensible, attractive young woman of about twenty-five, dressed simply and charmingly in white. They are listening to Mr. Harry Putnam, an elderly beau of the period, who stands twirling his moustaches, his feet crossed, ogling and talking to them. Mrs. Frothingham, — a buxom, florid dowager, very richly and fussily dressed, — sits on the tête-à-tête at left with her daughter, a pretty young girl of eighteen.

THE YOUNG MAN

[*To the young girl on his arm, as they cross the stage.*] A very brilliant party, don't you think?

THE GIRL

Oh, quite the most elegant affair of the winter! [*They turn to the stairs.*]

THE YOUNG MAN

[*To another young man just coming up.*] Oh, Frank, is the dancing saloon crowded?

THE SECOND YOUNG MAN

Not just now. They're beginning to serve supper.

THE FIRST YOUNG MAN

[*To the girl.*] Splendid! [*They go downstairs.*]

THE SECOND YOUNG MAN

[*To Mrs. Frothingham, with a bow.*] Mrs. Frothingham, may I have the honor of this polka?

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

You droll wretch, don't you know my dancing days are over?

THE YOUNG MAN

[*To the girl.*] Miss Frothingham, then, may be persuaded to atone for —

MISS FROTHINGHAM

[*Rising.*] Of course I may! I love to polk! [*They turn towards the stairs.*]

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

[*Rising.*] My dearest Susan — Agatha — forgive me if I come and talk to you. [*She joins the group at couch — right. Meanwhile the two men-about-town are heard to speak from the balustrade, where they are looking at crowd below.*]

THE FIRST MAN

Who's that woman with the diamonds — down there by the door? I thought at first it might be Cavallini.

THE SECOND MAN

[*Turning away.*] No, Cavallini's singing that new opera — what's its name?

FIRST MAN

Mignon?

THE SECOND MAN

Mignon — of course! She's still at the Academy — she won't be here till twelve.

THE FIRST MAN

Shall we have supper now or shall we wait?

THE SECOND MAN

Now, my dear chap, now! This is one of the few houses where Blue Seal Johannisberger flows like water.

THE FIRST

[*At the stairs.*] And the '48 claret! I'd forgotten that — [*They disappear below, talking. A burst of laughter from the girl who is flirting with the young man at the back of the scene.*]

THE GIRL

You mustn't talk to me that way any more! Now give me your arm and take me downstairs to mamma —

HER PARTNER

Do you know you have exactly the same effect on me as a glass of champagne!

THE GIRL

[*At the top of the stairs.*] Of course, I don't know anything about that!

HER PARTNER

No, of course not. It doesn't last long — still — while it lasts — [*They descend, talking and laughing.*]

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

[*Sitting on the couch, at right.*] You can say what you please, Miss Van Tuyl, the Rector's nose is *not* Grecian!

SUSAN

[*Very politely.*] Dear Mrs. Frothingham, are noses your only standard?

MRS. RUTHERFORD

[*Shaking her head.*] Ah, well — his grandfather on his mother's side came of very doubtful stock! An Irish peasant, I believe — he landed sometime about 1805.

SUSAN

Surely, Mrs. Rutherford, your memory doesn't take you quite as far back as all that?

PUTNAM

And to think we are condemned to listen to his sermons! Why, last Sunday I woke up just in time to catch the young puppy making scurrilous allusions to *me* — !

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

To you, Mr. Putnam? Dear me, I regret exceedingly that my neuralgia kept me from attending church! What did he — ?

SUSAN

He said he didn't doubt that several of our elderly beaux would soon be making Heaven fashionable and organizing society among the more exclusive angels!

[*Tom is seen leisurely coming upstairs. He is about twenty-eight, healthy, positive, and determined. He is dressed very simply and a little shabbily. He has a very hearty, genial quality, but no humor.*]

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

Abominable!

MRS. RUTHERFORD

Blasphemous, I call it!

PUTNAM

Hardly the remark of a gentleman!

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

But he's not a gentleman!

PUTNAM

He dresses like a pen-wiper!

MRS. RUTHERFORD

He spends all his spare time with working men!

PUTNAM

[*To Susan.*] My dear young lady, why your excellent uncle ever gave him the church is more than I shall ever understand!

SUSAN

Because uncle knows he's the coming man — that's why! Look what he's done here in just these two years! Hasn't he built up the congregation from nothing at all to the third biggest in New York? Hasn't he started the athletic club for the young men and the cooking classes for the girls? Hasn't he founded our parish school for poor children, and got people to donate a playground, and a circulating library, and a big hall for free lectures and musical entertainments? Isn't he just as much at home and just as much loved down in a Bowery saloon as he is here in a Fifth Avenue drawing-room? Isn't he —

PUTNAM

My dear Miss Van Tuyl!

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

He's impossible!

MRS. RUTHERFORD

Outrageous!

PUTNAM

A blot on the parish!

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

A disgrace to the church —

PUTNAM

[*Suddenly seeing Tom.*] Er — what wonderful weather we're having!

MRS. RUTHERFORD

[*To Mrs. Frothingham.*] Rather cold for November, don't you think?

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

[*Trembling.*] Yes — yes — very warm indeed —

SUSAN

[*Bewildered.*] But — [*She turns and sees Tom.*] Oh, I see! [*Smiling.*] We're talking about you, Tom.

TOM

[*Briefly.*] I heard. Thank you, Susan.

MRS. RUTHERFORD

[*Rising.*] We were all saying the most *flattering* things —

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

[*Rising.*] Dear Dr. Armstrong, I — I wonder your ears weren't *burning* —

PUTNAM

[*Laughing nervously.*] By Jove, yes — so do I!

TOM

Don't let me drive you away.

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

Er — I must look after Mabel. I mustn't let the dear child dance too much!

PUTNAM

And I was on the point of offering Mrs. Rutherford some supper.

MRS. RUTHERFORD

How very kind! [*To Susan.*] *Au revoir,* my dear — good-night, Dr. Armstrong.

MRS. FROTHINGHAM

Good-night — good-night.

PUTNAM

[*Bowing.*] Your servant. [*The three go downstairs.*]

SUSAN

[*After them.*] Don't go before Madame Cavallini comes — she's promised to sing for us and you know what *that* means! *Au revoir — au revoir!* [*Turning to Tom.*] Cats! Two tabbies and one old tom! Did you hear what they were saying?

TOM

Just a little. [*Loftily.*] What does it matter? *They're* not the people I care about — they're not the people that really *count!*

SUSAN

I know. But I just can't bear their criticizing you! [*Looking at him.*] Oh, Tom! You've got on your oldest clothes! Why couldn't you have stopped to dress?

TOM

Well, I was going to, honestly I was. But this is my night at the athletic club and about ten o'clock, just as I'd taken on the heavyweight of the ward, little Jimmy

Baxter came running in and said young Sullivan was drunk and killing his wife so would I please step over? [*Noticing her glance.*] What are you looking at?

SUSAN

Your hair!

TOM

[*Feeling it.*] Is it sticking up behind?

SUSAN

Just one lock — on the left. [*Coming up to him.*] Bend over! [*He does so and she smooths it down, as he goes on talking.*]

TOM

[*Going on all the time.*] And I found Sullivan in a fighting mood and rather difficult to manage and in the middle of it all, if Mrs. Sullivan didn't go and have another baby!

SUSAN

[*Trying to take out a spot from his lapel with her handkerchief.*] How terrible!

TOM

That's what I told her. I said it was bad enough to have married Sullivan, but to bring a child of his into the world was almost worse than *murder!*

SUSAN

[*Always busying herself with him.*] But, Tom — she was longing for another baby!

TOM

I can't help that. However, now it's come, will you go round tomorrow and make a note of how she's doing?

SUSAN

[*Turning him round and looking at him critically.*] Of course. Does she need any baby clothes?

TOM

She had a few. Mrs. Baxter's given her the rest.

SUSAN

Very well — I'll take charge. [*The orchestra is heard below.*]

A MAN'S VOICE

[*Coming upstairs.*] I say!

SUSAN

[*Looking over the balustrade.*] Oh, it's Mr. Livingstone! [*Enter Fred Livingstone, a dandified young man of about thirty.*]

FRED

[*Who is carrying a plate in each hand.*] There, Miss Van Tuyl! You owe that dab of mayonnaise to no less a person than the Golden Nightingale! [*To Tom.*] Hello, Tom — how goes it?

SUSAN

Why, Mr. Livingstone?

FRED

It's a fact. I never would have got it if it hadn't been for her. Why, all the literary and artistic talent in New York was fighting like a band of demons round the supper-table, when, thank the Lord! the band struck up and someone said that Cavallini had arrived!

SUSAN

[*Smiling.*] I see!

FRED

Two seconds — and there wasn't a soul in the dining-room but me! Why, even the caterer's men were standing up on chairs to catch a glimpse of the divinity!

SUSAN

I really *must* go down and greet her.

TOM

If you see your uncle, Susan, tell him where I am.

SUSAN

Very well. [*To Fred.*] Mr. Livingstone?

FRED

Er — will you excuse me, Miss Van Tuyl? I want to have a word or two with Tom here.

SUSAN

Of course. *Au revoir.* [*She goes downstairs.*]

FRED

[*Quivering.*] Well! This is the last time I bring my wife to *this* house!

TOM

[*Amazed.*] What — ?

FRED

Of all the disgraceful insults that I've ever seen — ! Why, the man must be out of his head!

TOM

Who?

FRED

Van Tuyl.

TOM

What on earth's he done?

FRED

[*Staring at him.*] *Done* — ? Good Lord, man, don't you realize who's downstairs? Don't you know who's making a tour of the rooms on his arm, as the guest of honor? Don't you know whom he's introducing to every respectable woman that's been fool enough to come here tonight —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] No, I don't — who?

FRED

[*Impressively.*] The Cavallini!

TOM

[*Puzzled.*] Oh, you mean that foreign opera singer? Well, what of it?

FRED

[*Exploding.*] What of it? By Jove, that's a cool one! I always knew you were advanced, Tom, but I'll swear I never thought you'd go as far as this!

TOM

What on earth —

FRED

[*Interrupting.*] It's bad enough to come and find the

house all full of dirty painter chaps and female novelists! It's vile enough to see your wife rub elbows with those garlic-eating, gutter-born Italian Opera scoundrels — well, I won't talk about the others, they're old and fat and ugly, and I don't know anything against 'em — but Cavallini —

TOM

Well?

FRED

I know Van Tuyl's our biggest banker and a leading citizen and a pillar of the church — that's all right, but when it comes to asking all New York to parties given for his mistress —

TOM

What — ?

FRED

It's true. She *is* his mistress!

TOM

[*Controlling himself with difficulty.*] Well?

FRED

I wouldn't have mentioned it if he hadn't brought her here tonight! I believe in letting a man's private affairs strictly alone, but gad! I expect him in return to show a little decency!

TOM

[*Ominously.*] I see.

FRED

And look here, Tom, so long as you're his rector and all that, I think you ought to speak to him about it — haul him over the coals and haul him jolly hard!

TOM

[*Holding himself in.*] And this is all you wanted to say to me?

FRED

Of course.

TOM

And you've quite finished?

FRED

I suppose so.

TOM

[*Coming close to him.*] Then *I* have one or two things to say to *you*. And I'll just begin by telling you what you are — and that's a miserable, sneaking, gossiping old woman —

FRED

[*Taken aback.*] Wait — hold on!

TOM

[*Continuing.*] A pitiful, cackling, empty-headed fool who hears a dirty story and can't wait until he's passed it on! Why, you apology for the male sex, do you know what you're doing? You're a guest in a gentleman's house — you've eaten his food and shaken him by the hand and now you're turning round and circulating filthy vicious lies behind his back —

FRED

[*Interrupting.*] They're not lies! He's lived with her for years — she has a villa on the Riviera that Van Tuyl gave her — it's called Millefleurs — Jack Morris saw them there together —

TOM

[*Thundering.*] Be still!

FRED

[*Angrily, as he gets behind the sofa and talks over it.*] I won't be still! Why, all the fellows know what Rita Cavallini is — except yourself and you're a clergyman. Ask Guvvy Fisk — he knew the French musician chap that found her singing under hotel windows years ago in Venice. And Guvvy knows just when she kicked him out and went off with that Russian grand-duke and lived with him in Petersburg, until the Prince de Joinville set her up in Paris! Why, she's notorious all over Europe — she's ruined whole families — run through fortune after fortune — it was outside *her* door that that young English poet shot himself — the Emperor borrowed money from the Rothschilds just to buy her diamonds — the King of Naples gave her —

TOM

[*Breaking in.*] Stop it, Livingstone!

FRED

[*Going right on.*] And as for Van Tuyl, well, everybody knows what *he's* been like —

TOM

Look out!

FRED

Why, Louis the Fourteenth couldn't beat him when it comes to —

TOM

[*Interrupting and making for him.*] You little cur you —

[*Just here Van Tuyl comes up from downstairs. He is a man of about fifty, tall, deep-voiced and strong — a powerful personality. His manner is gentle and full of a wise, quiet humor. He is dressed soberly, but beautifully and with great care.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] Well, my young friends! What's the matter?

FRED

[*Politely.*] Oh, nothing! Tom and I were arguing — that's all. [*He looks at his watch.*] Good gracious — twelve o'clock! You haven't seen my wife, sir?

VAN TUYL

But you're not going? Why, Mme. Cavallini's going to sing!

FRED

Er — I'm afraid we must. [*Offering his hand.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Taking it.*] Oh, why?

FRED

[*Simply.*] I'd rather my wife heard Mme. Cavallini across the footlights — a touch of prejudice, I suppose — don't let it bother you — good-night! [*He bows, smiles, and goes downstairs.*]

TOM

[*Simply and a little shyly.*] I'd have come downstairs to find you, sir, but I'm not dressed — as you see — and I thought you mightn't like it.

VAN TUYL

[*Heartily.*] Nonsense, my boy! Why, you've no time to prink up for our foolish parties. I think you're very good to come at all. I don't remember if you're interested in terra-cottas, Tom, but if you are — [*He is at the mantel, lifting one of the vases lovingly.*] Here's something that came in last week. It's a lekythos of the time of Pericles. Look at the exquisite grace and freshness of those figures! By Jove, they breathe a fragrance of eternal youth — and the hand that made them has been dust two thousand years!

TOM

[*Hastily.*] Er — very pretty — very pretty indeed.

VAN TUYL

[*Looking at the vase.*] Two thousand years — I wonder where *we* were then — eh, Tom? [*He puts back the vase with a sigh.*] But I think you care more for pictures than for terra-cottas, don't you? Come and look at the new Millet. It's in my room where I can see it every morning, just as soon as I wake up. By Jove, he's a wonderful fellow, that Millet — and some day he's bound to be recognized, even if —

TOM

[*Firmly.*] Thanks, sir, but if you don't mind I'd rather stay here. I want to — to talk to you.

VAN TUYL

[*Genially.*] Of course — just as you say.

TOM

[*Awkwardly.*] I don't quite know how to begin, sir, as

it's a rather important — and at the same time a rather — a rather *delicate* matter, but — but — [*Suddenly.*] I'm not by any chance keeping you from your guests?

VAN TUYL

[*Always smiling.*] Not at all.

TOM

[*Again awkward.*] But — it's — er — something that I really feel I ought to — er — I mean to say I — er — consider it in the light of — an obligation — to — er — to —

VAN TUYL

[*Interrupting.*] Tom.

TOM

Yes, sir?

VAN TUYL

[*Putting his hand on Tom's arm.*] It's — it's about Susan, isn't it?

TOM

Yes, but —

VAN TUYL

Then it's all right. My boy, I'm as glad as I can be!

TOM

[*Puzzled.*] But *what's* all right? I'm afraid, sir, I don't follow you.

VAN TUYL

Why, aren't you asking me if — [*He looks at him sharply.*]

TOM

I'm sorry, sir, but it's advice I wish to offer you.

VAN TUYL

Advice — ?

TOM

Yes, I regret it, but it's my duty.

VAN TUYL

In that case, pray go on. [*He sits.*] Won't you sit down? [*He lights a cigar.*]

TOM

No, thanks. [*Ingenuously.*] Mr. Van Tuyl, I suppose some people would say that after all you'd done for St. Giles and me, it wasn't in my place to suggest anything —

VAN TUYL

Nonsense, Tom. Do you know you're getting to look more like your dear mother every day?

TOM

No, am I? [*Resuming.*] But after all, I am your Rector and I feel I've got to — to —

VAN TUYL

Quite right, my boy, I respect your feelings. Well?

TOM

[*Struggling.*] Have you ever thought — I mean — wouldn't it be better if — that is to say — do you think you're wise, Mr. Van Tuyl, in opening your doors to these foreign opera singers? [*Going on quickly.*] Oh, I know how broad-minded you are and how interested in art and music and all that sort of thing, and it's splendid! It's so splendid, sir, that I couldn't bear to think anyone was imposing on your liberality.

VAN TUYL

[*Calmly.*] Whom do you mean?

TOM

This Madame Cavallini — isn't it? I know she's very distinguished, and I quite understand your public spirit in recognizing her genius by making her the centre of one of your elegant entertainments. But after all, sir, are you quite sure she's the sort of lady — the kind of person — er — the type — [*With a gesture.*] — I say the type —

VAN TUYL

[*Mildly.*] It isn't Sunday, Tom.

TOM

[*Paternally.*] You know, sir, you're so generous and high-minded that anybody could take you in — oh, yes they could! [*With a shake of the head.*] And, personally speaking, I have always found that foreigners — particularly those belonging to the Latin races — have a distinct leaning towards immorality.

VAN TUYL

How old are you, Tom?

TOM

[*Lamely.*] Er — twenty-eight.

VAN TUYL

[*With a wistful smile.*] I wish *I* were twenty-eight. Life's a simple thing when you're twenty-eight.

TOM

[*Loftily.*] If one has standards — yes.

VAN TUYL

Standards?

TOM

Of right and wrong, I mean.

VAN TUYL

Oh, yes — I had those standards once.

TOM

[*Shocked.*] *Once*, sir?

VAN TUYL

[*Confidentially.*] And then one day I got 'em all mixed up — and the right seemed wrong and the wrong seemed right and I just didn't know where I was at.

TOM

Oh, come, sir!

VAN TUYL

That was a long time ago, my boy, but — [*With a chuckle.*] Well, I'm dashed if I ever got 'em straight again!

TOM

[*Distressed.*] Oh, sir, don't talk that way!

VAN TUYL

[*Soberly.*] I've learnt a few things, though — stray spars I've clung to in all this storm and ocean — just a few stray spars, but somehow they've managed to hold me up. One's how to value people that are good — that's why

you're Rector of St. Giles, Tom — and another's how to pity people that are —

TOM

Bad.

VAN TUYL

No, not bad, my boy — there are no people that are bad. But there're some poor devils who find it harder to be good than you — that's all.

TOM

[*Hesitatingly.*] And Madame Cavallini?

VAN TUYL

If Madame Cavallini weren't fit to meet my friends, you never would have seen her here tonight. [*Slight pause.*]

TOM

[*Impulsively.*] Oh, what a fool I've been! I might have known there wasn't a word of truth in what that puppy said.

VAN TUYL

What puppy?

TOM

A young he-gossip, sir, who reeled off lies about this woman. And I was ass enough to believe him, and come to you and talk like a — like a — like a confounded prig! I wonder you don't throw me out of the house!

VAN TUYL

[*With a twinkle.*] You're my Rector, Tom.

TOM

Do you think you can forgive me, sir? [*Just here the band downstairs begins a beguiling Strauss waltz.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Rising.*] There's nothing to forgive, my boy. And now go down and ask Susan for some supper.

TOM

But I'm not dressed —

VAN TUYL

Oh, nonsense! But if you'd rather go into the library, I'll tell her to bring it to you there. [*Meanwhile, there is heard down the staircase the sound of men's voices, high and eager, and over and above them, a woman's laughter. This comes nearer and nearer.*]

TOM

But I'm not —

VAN TUYL

[*Clapping him on the shoulder.*] Don't tell me you're not hungry! You're twenty-eight years old, and when a young man's twenty-eight — hello! who's this? [*He turns and glances at back, as the sound of the voices and laughter grows nearer.*]

A WOMAN'S VOICE

[*Just off, rising above the others.*] Go 'vay — go 'vay — you mus' not come vit' me — no — no — you are naughty — you are de mos' 'orrible naughty men I ever see — [*She sweeps up with the group of young dandies who have accompanied her and stands for a moment at the top of the*

stairway, laughing and talking, always facing in the direction whence she came, away from Tom and Van Tuyl. She is a bewitching, brilliant little foreign creature — beautiful in a dark, Italian way. She is marvellously dressed in voluminous gauze and her dress is trimmed with tiny roses. Her black hair hangs in curls on either side of her face and three long soft curls hang down her low-cut back. On her head is a wreath of little roses. She wears long diamond earrings, a rivière of diamonds is about her neck, diamonds gleam on her corsage, her wrists and hands. She carries a fan and bouquet in a silver filigree holder. She speaks in a soft Italian voice, with quick bird-like gestures. She seems herself a good deal like an exquisite, gleaming, little humming-bird.]

ONE OF THE YOUNG MEN

But it's my waltz!

ANOTHER

Don't listen to him, madame, you know you promised me to —

A THIRD

[*Interrupting.*] Nonsense, Willie — *my* name's on her card!

THE FIRST

It's no such thing!

THE SECOND

I appeal to her!

THE THIRD

Madame —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Oh — ! Vhy you make such a beeg, beeg noise?

THE FIRST YOUNG MAN

[*Frankly.*] You're driving us crazy — can't you understand?

RITA

[*Mock serious.*] What? *Me* — ? Poor, leetle me? You beeg bad boy, you make of me — 'ow you say? — vone seelly joke!

THE CHORUS

"We don't!" "It's true!" "Of course it is!"

RITA

[*Laughing.*] Go make de love to dose bee-eautiful Amer'-can ladies vit' de long nose an' de neck full of leetle bones — !

ONE OF THE YOUNG MEN

But I want to make love to *you!*

ANOTHER

And so do I!

A THIRD

I do, too!

THE OTHERS

And I — and I!

RITA

Ouf! You cannot *all* make de love to me — so look! I tell you — [*They all gather nearer.*]

ONE OF THEM

What?

ANOTHER

Tell us!

RITA

[*Triumphantly.*] You shall not *any* of you make de love to me!

CHORUS

[*Disappointed.*] "Oh, madame!" "Please!" "You must!" etc.

RITA

No — no! I stay 'ere vit' Meestaire Van Tuyl —

CHORUS

"Oh, don't!" "What a shame!" "Please come downstairs!" etc.

RITA

But leesten now! Vhich vone of you, 'e catch dis peenk camellia — look! — 'e drive me 'ome! [*She holds up the flower.*]

THE MEN

[*Surging forward to snatch it.*] "Give me it!" "Oh, madame!" "Get out the way!" "It's mine!"

RITA

[*Laughing and tossing it over the balustrade.*] It is all gone — so run — run qvick — qvick! Oh, 'e has fallen himself down — dat leetle meestaire! *Povrino!* [*Excitedly, looking over balustrade.*] Oh — ! Oh — ! You vill be 'urted — [*Pointing.*] *O Dio! Guardi — guardi!* [*Clapping her hands and leaning over the balustrade.*] All right — all right — you meestaire vit' de beeg moustache — *Bene! — capito!* You take me 'ome! [*She kisses her hand and turns away, still laughing.*] Dey are so frightfully funny, dose — [*She suddenly sees Tom, who has been standing*

quite still, staring at her all the time. She stops. The words die away from her lips. She looks at him. An instant's pause.]

TOM

[*Indistinctly, as he tears his gaze away from her.*] I — I beg your pardon. [*He passes her quickly, his head bent, and goes out. She turns and follows him with her eyes.*]

RITA

[*Very simply, still looking after him.*] Please who is dat young man?

VAN TUYL

Tom Armstrong. He's a clergyman.

RITA

[*Vaguely.*] Cler-gee-man?

VAN TUYL

Abbé — priest, you know.

RITA

[*Almost to herself.*] Ah — ! Den it vas *dat* —

VAN TUYL

What?

RITA

[*Turning away.*] I dunno. Jus' somet'ing in 'is eyes —

VAN TUYL

I don't suppose he'd ever seen anything like you in all his life.

RITA

No? My Lord, 'ow ver' sad! [*Glancing again downstairs — this time with a certain impishness.*] An' he vas 'an'some, too!

[*Van Tuyl chuckles. She hears him, turns, catches his eye and they laugh together.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Coming up, still laughing, and taking her in his arms.*] You little monkey you!

RITA

[*Softly, her eyes closed, a smile of triumph on her lips.*) De beeg Amer'can, 'e like 'is leetle frien' tonight — yes?

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] I don't think he could help it if he tried.

RITA

Den if 'e like 'er — [*She pauses.*]

VAN TUYL

Well?

RITA

[*Softly.*] Please vhy don' 'e keess 'er?

VAN TUYL

[*Laughing and kissing her.*] There!

RITA

[*Drawing herself away suddenly.*] My Lord, I 'ave forget somet'ing!

VAN TUYL

[*Following her.*] Come here!

RITA

I 'ave forget dat I am oh! mos' frightfully angry!

VAN TUYL

Not with me?

RITA

Si — si!

VAN TUYL

But why? What have I done?

RITA

[*Briefly.*] You know.

VAN TUYL

My dear, I don't!

RITA

[*Sitting — right.*] Ssh! You mus' not say t'ings like dat — dey are not true! You 'ave treat me ver' bad to-night — yes, you 'ave treat me qvite, qvite — on-spikable!

VAN TUYL

Why, I've invited you to my house! I've introduced you to my friends — the most distinguished people in New York! I've entertained you before all the world — and isn't that exactly what you wanted?

RITA

You ask me to your *soirée* — dat is true — but you ask me as *artiste* not as *femme du monde.*

VAN TUYL

That isn't so!

RITA

[*Like a flash.*] Ah no? Den please vhy you ask de oder singers too?

VAN TUYL

Now, Rita, listen —

RITA

I vill not leesten! You t'ink I am a leetle — vhat you say? — *donnacia — une p'tite grisette* —

VAN TUYL

My dear, you know I don't think anything of the sort —

RITA

An' it is not tonight alone — oh, no! It is two — t'ree mont's — all de time since first I come to your mos' ver' diza-agree-a-ble country! [*With a smile.*] A-ah! It vas not like dis at Millefleurs! I vas not dere a singer from de opera! At Millefleurs I vas a qveen!

VAN TUYL

Millefleurs — ! Our Palace of a Thousand Flowers.

RITA

[*Caressingly.*] Do you remember de night I sing to you de Schubert serenade — vhen you valk up an' down below de vindow — yes? All de roses in de vorld, dey blossom in de moonlight. Dere vas no vind. De sea vas qvite, qvite steel — an' you valk up an' down — up an' down — an' alvays I sing to you — an' sing — an' sing —

an' de vind an' de sea an' de beeg gol' moon — dey all of dem leesten to me!

VAN TUYL

[*Rousing himself.*] That was Millefleurs. The roses there had brought me back my youth. [*With a sigh.*] I came home, and I lost it, dear. I'll never find it again.

RITA

Ah, no — it vaits for you among de flowers!

VAN TUYL

I'm afraid — not any more.

RITA

Vhat you mean, please?

VAN TUYL

I'm fifty-one years old. [*She instinctively draws away from him a little.*] That frightens you?

RITA

Ah, no, but —

VAN TUYL

[*Gently.*] Don't deny it, dear — I know how — you must feel. [*Pause.*] Rita.

RITA

Vell?

VAN TUYL

Rita, suppose we finish our — our friendship — end it here tonight.

RITA

Tonight — ?

VAN TUYL

Give me your hand. There! Now we can talk! — I'm fond of you, dear — I always shall be that — but already I'm beginning to disappoint you. And I'm afraid I'll do it more and more as time goes on. [*Slight pause.*] Look at my hair! There wasn't any grey in it last year — at Millefleurs! But now — and next year there'll be more! And I've begun to be a little deaf and fall asleep in chairs and dream about tomorrow's dinner. My rheumatism, too, came back last week — [*She winces and draws away her hand.*] Don't blame me, dear — I can't help getting old.

RITA

[*Nervously.*] Don' — don' talk dat vay!

VAN TUYL

[*Quickly.*] God knows I'm not complaining! I've lived my life — and it's been very sweet. I've done some work, and done it pretty well, and then I've found time to enjoy a great many of the beautiful things that fill this beautiful world. [*Politely.*] Among them, my dear, I count your voice — and you! [*Resuming.*] And yet the fact remains I've *lived* my life, I'm in the twilight years — oh! they're golden yet, but that won't last, and they'll grow deep and dim until the last tinge of the sunset's gone and the stars are out and night comes — and it's time to sleep. [*With a change of tone.*] But you — Good Lord, *your* life has just begun! Why, the dew's still on the grass — it's sparkling brighter than your brightest diamonds! [*He touches the ornaments.*] The birds are singing madrigals, the meadow's burst into a sea of flowers — you wear the morning like a wreath upon your hair — don't lose all that, my dear, —

don't waste your springtime on a stupid fellow, fifty-one years old! [*Pause.*]

RITA

[*Coldly.*] All right. [*She turns away, whistling.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Watching.*] What's the matter?

RITA

[*Casually.*] Oh, nodings.

VAN TUYL

Yes, there is.

RITA

Vone more — 'ow you say? — frien'ship feenished — ! [*In a hard voice.*] Vone more — ! [*With a careless gesture.*] *Oh, che m'importa — ce ne sono altri!* [*She yawns ostentatiously and sniffs her bouquet.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Looking at her keenly.*] Rita?

RITA

Vell — Meestaire Van Tuyl?

VAN TUYL

[*Simply.*] Haven't you ever loved someone?

RITA

'Ow you talk? 'Ave I not love *you* two — t'ree year?

VAN TUYL

[*Always very gently.*] I don't mean that. Isn't there

someone whose memory is dear and — and sort of holy — like an altar-candle, burning in your heart?

RITA

[*In a hard voice.*] No.

VAN TUYL

Think back — way back. Didn't someone ever make you feel so tender that you didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the thought of him? Wasn't there ever someone you wanted to help so much that it — it hurt you, like living pain? Wasn't there someone that your heart and soul just rushed out to meet — and all the time you stood before him and looked down and — and couldn't say one single little word? Wasn't there someone who —

RITA

[*Rising suddenly.*] *Basta! Basta* — ! Stop it — don' — don' — [*A little pause. She recovers herself.*] 'Ave *you* felt — like dat?

VAN TUYL

[*Nodding.*] Yes.

RITA

Who vas she?

VAN TUYL

[*Simply.*] Just a girl. Not wonderful or beautiful or gifted — and yet — well, somehow she meant the world to me.

RITA

What 'appen?

VAN TUYL

She died before I ever told her that I loved her. [*Pause.*]

RITA

[*Not looking at him.*] It vas a good t'ing — dat she die so soon.

VAN TUYL

What?

RITA

Sometime I vish dat *I* 'ad died before I ever 'ear dose vords — "I love you."

VAN TUYL

What do you mean?

RITA

[*Ironically.*] I never tol' you of my first so bee-eautiful romance? No — ? Vell, I do not often t'ink of it — it make me feel — [*With a curious little shiver.*] — not nize. [*Pause.*] It vas in Venice. I vas jus' seexteen years ol'. I play de guitar wid de *serenata* — you know, de leetle company of peoples dat go about an' sing under de vindows of de great 'otels — [*With a sigh.*] *Ah Madonna! come sembra lontano!*

VAN TUYL

Well?

RITA

[*Not looking at him.*] A young man come join our serenata — Beppo, 'is name vas — Beppo Aquilone. 'E vas 'an'some an' 'e 'ad nize voice — oh, ver' light, you know, but steel — *simpatica.* Ve stan' together vhen ve sing an' 'ave — I dunno — vone, two duet. An' so it go for two — t'ree veek an' 'e say noding much, but every time 'e smile an' look at me my 'eart is full vit' great beeg vishes an' I feel like everyt'ing in all de vorld is new an'

born again. An' so vone evening 'e come vit' me to my leetle room — an' den 'e tell me dat 'e love me — an' all night long 'e 'old me close an' keess me — an' I feel 'is 'ot breat' like a fire upon my face — an' de beating of 'is 'eart, it come like strong blows 'ere against my own. An' den 'e sleep. But I — I do not sleep. I lie still an' qviet an' in my mind I have vone t'ought — "Is dis vhat people mean vhen dey say — Love?" An' so de 'ours go by, an' de night is feenish, an' a — a — 'ow you say? — a long, t'in piece of sunlight, it creep in my leetle vindow an' it shine on Beppo vhere 'e lie beside me. An' oh! 'e look so young! — an' den de sunlight — 'ow you say? — it tease him, so 'e 'alf vake up, an' 'e vink 'is eyes an' say, "*Ah, Rita, ti amo!*" An' den 'e sigh an' put 'is 'ead 'ere — on my shoulder — like a leetle baby dat is tired, an' go to sleep again. [*With passionate tenderness.*] An' oh! I put my arm about 'im an' I smile an' t'ink "For Love I vaited all night long, an' vit' de day — *it come!*"

VAN TUYL

And so it does, my dear.

RITA

[*In a different voice.*] You t'ink so? Vait — ! [*She has turned away.*] In tvelve 'our — *tvelve 'our!* — 'e sell me to an English traveller for feefty *lire*. At first, I t'ink I die — I soffer so! An' den at las' I on'erstan' — an' laugh — an' know dat I 'ave been vone great beeg fool —

VAN TUYL

[*Protesting.*] My dear, I —

RITA

[*Shaking her clenched hands.*] A fool to t'ink dere vas

some greater, better love — a love dat come at morning an' shine like sunshine — [*With a wide gesture.*] — yes, all t'rough de day!

VAN TUYL

There is.

RITA

[*Fiercely.*] Dat is vone lie! You 'ear — ? vone lie! [*Voluptuously.*] Love — it is made of keesses in de dark, of 'ot breat' on de face an' 'eart beats jus' like terrible strong blows! It is a struggle — ver' cruel an' sveet — all full of madness an' of vhispered vords an' leetle laughs dat turn into a sigh! Love is de 'unger for anoder's flesh — a deep down t'irst to dreenk anoder's blood — Love is a beast dat feed all t'rough de night an' vhen de morning come — *Love dies!* [*Slight pause.*]

VAN TUYL

My dear, I think you must have suffered a great deal.

RITA

Yes — because I 'ave believe vonce in a lie, but — [*Shaking her finger.*] — not any more! [*With a grimace.*] Oh, vhy ve talk about dose bad ol' t'ings? — see 'ere — I blow dem far avay! Pst — ! Pouf — ! [*With an enchanting smile.*] Now look! Dey are all gone! [*As he does not answer, but looks at her.*] Vell? Vhat you t'ink about so 'ard — yes?

VAN TUYL

Why don't you marry someone, Rita?

RITA

Marry — *me* — ?

VAN TUYL

Well, why not?

RITA

Vhere vould I fin' a man to make of me 'is vife?

VAN TUYL

[*Protesting.*] Nonsense, dear, why —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] My frien', you 'ave forget a leetle — vhat I am. [*Brief pause.*]

VAN TUYL

I'm sorry, dear.

RITA

[*Quickly.*] Sorry — ? Bah! Do you t'ink I care? I — who 'ave 'ad de great men of de vorld among my lovers? Ah, no, my frien', I 'ave not come to dat!

VAN TUYL

I understand.

RITA

[*Turning and looking at him.*] De great men of de vorld! An' *you* are vone of dem — oh, yes, I know it vhen I see you first at dat beeg supper Rossini give for me. An' I ask 'im — I say "Maestro, who is dat man who seet next de Russian princess?" An' 'e laugh an' say, "Vhat? Not already you make up your min'?" an' den I see you look at me —

VAN TUYL

Of course!

RITA

An' I smile — oh, mos' sveet!

VAN TUYL

[*Rising.*] You little rascal you!

RITA

An' so — ve 'ave begin. [*She considers him.*] Come 'ere! [*He comes close to her. She takes him by the lapel and looks up at him.*] You know vhat I t'ink — yes?

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] I never know.

RITA

I t'ink — ve 'ave not come *qvite* to de en'.

VAN TUYL

My dear, you make me very happy.

RITA

So you vill drive vit' me tomorrow afternoon at four?

VAN TUYL

I'm honored.

RITA

I tell you somet'ing —

VAN TUYL

Well?

RITA

You are naughty — but I like you frightfully much!

VAN TUYL

[*Kissing her hand.*] Madame, I'm more than grateful. [*The orchestra begins a waltz downstairs.*] Good Heavens, I've forgotten I'm a host! What will those wretched people think! My arm — ? [*He offers it to her.*]

RITA

[*Like an unwilling child.*] Vhen mus' I sing?

VAN TUYL

Let's see. I've asked Artot and Capoul for the duet from *Traviata* — and then I want the sextette from *Lucia* — and after that we'll all be ready for the Golden Nightingale!

RITA

[*Lying on the sofa.*] De Golden Nightingale vill rest alone 'ere till de time is come. An' oh! sen' someone vit' 'er red vine an' 'er lemon-juice! She is so tired — she cannot sing vit'out!

VAN TUYL

That's all?

RITA

Dat's all.

VAN TUYL

You're beautiful tonight.

RITA

[*Lying back and looking up at him.*] Vhy not? My star is Venus — I vas born for love!

VAN TUYL

[*Tenderly.*] "O love forever in thy glory go!"
[*The sound of the waltz is heard full of insistent rhythm.*

With a sigh, she flings her arms above her head, stretches her body, and closes her eyes. Then, with a burst of chatter and laughter, three young couples rush up the stairs.]

THE FIRST YOUNG MAN

[*To his partner.*] Come on!

THE GIRL

Oh, what fun! We'll have it all to ourselves!

THE FIRST YOUNG MAN

Quick! Before the others see us — [*They begin to dance.*]

ANOTHER GIRL

I'm dying to learn the Boston Dip!

HER PARTNER

It's perfectly easy — [*Dancing.*] One — two — *down!* One — two — *down!*

VAN TUYL

[*Turning from the couch.*] Ssh! Madame Cavallini's trying to rest a little before she sings! [*He smiles at the young people and puts his finger to his lips.*]

ONE OF THE GIRLS

Oh, of course, sir.

ANOTHER GIRL

We never noticed.
[*Van Tuyl goes downstairs.*]

THE THIRD GIRL

[*Whispering.*] She's asleep! [*They all gaze towards the couch.*]

ONE OF THE YOUNG MEN

[*Rapturously.*] I say! Isn't she a vision!

HIS PARTNER

Ssh! You'll wake her up!

THE SECOND YOUNG MAN

Let's go down to the conservatory.

THE THIRD YOUNG MAN

Tip-toe, you girls!
[*They begin to descend again.*]

TOM

[*Entering from the library.*] Mr. Van Tuyl, I — [*He stops on seeing the departing young people.*] Oh, it's you, my young friends!

ONE OF THE GIRLS

[*Whispering to him over her shoulder as she disappears.*] Mr. Van Tuyl's just gone downstairs.

TOM

[*About to follow her.*] Thank you.

RITA

[*Suddenly opening her eyes and speaking from her couch.*] You are going?

TOM

[*Turning.*] I beg your pardon?

RITA

[*Smiling.*] Don' go — please —

TOM

[*Stuttering.*] But I — I — I —

RITA

I vas jus' begun to be a *leetle* — 'ow you say? — lonely? An' now a nize young man come — oh! my Lord, I am so glad! [*She smiles at him bewitchingly.*]

TOM

You're sure I'm not — intruding?

RITA

But no! Come in an' — 'ow you say? — oh yes! make yourself qvite to 'ome!

TOM

Er — thank you. [*He sits down on other side of room.*]

RITA

Vhy you sit vay, vay over dere?

TOM

Why — er — er — I don't know — I —

RITA

[*Sweetly.*] Are you afraid of me? [*As one would talk to a young and timid baby.*] I vill not 'urt you — no, I *like* de young men! Please come! Sit 'ere! [*She indicates a chair at foot of couch.*]

TOM

You're — very kind. [*He comes over and sits down.*]

RITA

[*Lying back with a sigh.*] A-ah! [*She smiles at him. A pause. Then, curiously.*] What make your face so red?

TOM

[*In consternation.*] My face —

RITA

[*Dreamily.*] It is de reddes' t'ing I ever see in all my life!

TOM

[*Agonized.*] It's rather — warm in here.

RITA

You t'ink so? *I* am qvite, qvite col'.

TOM

That's — very odd. [*Pause.*] I'm afraid I — I haven't had the honor of being — presented — er — my name's Armstrong.

RITA

Ar-rm-str-rong! But dat is not all — eh? Now vait — no — yes — *ecco!* I 'ave it — *Teem!*

TOM

[*Slightly nettled.*] No, not Tim. That's Irish. Tom.

RITA

Tome!

TOM

Not Tome. *Tom!*

RITA

Tom — ! Dat right — ? [*Repeating it to herself.*] Tom — Tom! [*Laughing.*] My Lord — vhat a funny name!

TOM

It's not a *real* name. It's just short for Thomas.

RITA

[*Illuminated.*] Ah — Tomasso! *Si — si! Now* I on'erstan'! I vonce 'ave a frien' name' Tomasso — oh, yes, ver' long ago! 'E 'ave jus' vone leg. 'E vas — 'ow you say? — rag-picker!

TOM

Was he?

RITA

[*Critically.*] You look mos' ver' much like 'im!

TOM

[*Pulling uncomfortably at his coat.*] Do I?

RITA

[*With a sudden happy thought.*] Mebbe *you* are fine, beeg, Amer'can rag-picker — no?

TOM

[*Severely.*] Madam, I am the Rector of St. Giles' Church!

RITA

R-r-rector?

TOM

Yes — I mean I — I own it — I'm its minister — its clergyman —

RITA

[*Quickly.*] Oh, *cler-gee-man!* I 'ave forget! 'Ow bee-eautiful! An' Saint Gile' — who vas 'e? Some leetle Amer'can saint — *hein?*

TOM

[*Sternly.*] St. Giles is one of the most important figures in the great history of the Church of England!

RITA

[*Softly.*] Is dat so? Anodder cler-gee-man — yes? [*He nods.*] 'Ow frightfully nize! Ve never 'ear of 'im in Italy.

TOM

[*Struck.*] In Italy — ! Why, you don't live in Italy.

RITA

I 'ave a house in Florence an' a villa on de Lago di Como — yes.

TOM

[*With a relieved laugh.*] Oh, that's all right, then. Do you know what I thought for just a moment?

RITA

No. Vhat you t'ink?

TOM

I thought that you were one of these Italian opera singers!

RITA

[*Laughing.*] You funny man!

TOM

Forgive me — do!

RITA

It vill be 'ard!

TOM

You see, there're lots of them downstairs, — but then, I ought to have known, because Fred Livingstone said they were all old and fat and ugly.

RITA

[*Dampened.*] Oh — ! Did 'e?

TOM

With one exception — Madame Cavarini — or lini — or whatever her name is. You know.

RITA

[*Smiling.*] Yes — I know. An' you — vhat *you* t'ink? You fin' 'er bee-eautiful?

TOM

I — ? Oh, *I* haven't seen her. *I* don't go to the opera.

RITA

[*Confidentially.*] You 'ave not miss much vhen you miss La Cavallini. She is of a fatness — [*With a gesture.*] Oh, like dat!

TOM

You're sure?

RITA

[*Nodding.*] She eat tvelve poun' of spaghetti every day!

TOM

No!

RITA

[*Enthusiastically.*] An' ugly — oh, Madonna! — 'ow dat vomans is ugly! Jus' to look at 'er give vone de nose-bleed!

TOM

But everybody says —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Leesten! Vone eye is made of glass — an' 'er nose — my Lord, 'er nose!

TOM

What's the matter with her nose?

RITA

[*Covering her face with her hands.*] She 'as not got vone — !!

TOM

But surely you're mistaken — why —

RITA

[*Shuddering.*] Jus' *papier-maché* — stuck to 'er face! *O Dio!*

TOM

Well, I suppose her figure is what makes them say —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] I tell you somet'ing *terrible!* She 'as a 'ump!

TOM

A what?

RITA

[*With horrid emphasis.*] A 'ump — a 'ump upon 'er back!

TOM

You mean a *hump?*

RITA

[*Nodding.*] 'Er dressmaker in Paris — she tell me dat. *Now* vhat you t'ink — eh?

TOM

[*Rising.*] Do you really want to know?

RITA

Yes — tell me, please!

TOM

[*Very sternly.*] I think, madam, you have been guilty of the grossest cruelty!

RITA

Vhat — ?

TOM

[*Oracularly.*] Yes — *cruelty,* I repeat the word! To hear a woman, on whom an all-wise Providence has showered its choicest gifts of health and wealth and beauty — I say to hear a woman like yourself deride, hold up to scorn and

gloat over the physical failings of a less fortunate sister — for, madam, you *are* sisters in the sight of God! — I say this heartless act deserves a far more serious rebuke than any I'm at — at liberty to offer.

RITA

[*Suddenly covering her face with her pocket handkerchief and gasping.*] Ah — don' — don' —

TOM

What if this unhappy lady *does* suffer from — exaggerated fleshiness? Beneath that bulk may beat the tenderest of female hearts! What if her face *is* repulsive even to the degree that you mention? The purest thoughts may animate the brain behind! What if one eye is glass? The other, doubtless, is the window of a noble soul! And even though she bears a hump upon her back, she may, with Christian patience, change it to a — [*Suddenly inspired.*] — a cross!

RITA

[*Her voice still covered, shaking.*] Don' — don' — ! *Dio mio* — ! I cannot bear it —

TOM

[*Professionally.*] I am glad my few, poor simple words have touched you. Never forget them — let them be with you always — and, should the temptation come again, remember that a soft, sweet tongue is Woman's Brightest Ornament!

RITA

[*Unable to control herself.*] Tschk — ! Tschk — ! Tschk — ! [*She presses the handkerchief over her mouth.*]

TOM

[*Suddenly, taking a step toward her.*] *Madam* — !

RITA

[*Dropping the handkerchief and screaming with laughter.*] I cannot 'elp it — oh — ! oh — ! *oh* — !

TOM

[*Grinding his teeth and striking one palm against the other as he turns away.*] Madam — ! You — a-ah!

RITA

[*Exhausted, gasping.*] Oh — ! oh — ! [*Wiping her eyes.*] My Lord — !

[*A servant comes from downstairs carrying a tray with glasses, a carafe, and a decanter of wine.*]

THE SERVANT

The wine, madam.

RITA

P-put it 'ere — on dis leetle table. [*She indicates the little table by the head of the couch. The servant places the tray upon it.*]

THE SERVANT

Is that all you will require, madam?

RITA

Yes — dat is all. [*The servant goes downstairs.*]

TOM

[*Stiffly.*] Good-night.

RITA

You are not going?

TOM

After what has occurred, I see no reason for staying.

RITA

[*Carelessly.*] All right. [*She half-rises and occupies herself with an elaborate mixing of the wine and lemon-juice and water.*]

TOM

[*Lingering.*] Aren't you sorry for making fun of me?

RITA

[*Always intent on the drink.*] Oh — so frightfully sorry!

TOM

[*Doubtfully.*] You don't look it.

RITA

[*As before.*] Is dat so? Good-bye.

[*Tom walks to stairs, pauses, hesitates — then slowly comes back and sits down in his old chair.*]

TOM

Madam —

RITA

[*Turning to glance at him.*] Oh! I t'ought you go!

TOM

[*With dignity.*] So long as you're sincerely sorry — so long as you truly repent — [*He pauses expectantly, awaiting her corroboration. But she whistles gaily and pays no atten-*

tion to him. He finishes somewhat lamely:] I don't suppose there's any need of my going.

RITA

[*Lightly.*] No? My Lord, I am dead vit' joy!

TOM

[*Sternly.*] Madam —

RITA

[*Gaily, as she pours the drink from one glass to another.*] Look — ! See 'ow bee-eautiful I do it — ! [*Her voice softening.*] Somevone who vas vonce ver' fon' of me, *'e* teach me dis! [*He stares, hypnotized. She finishes and fills both glasses.*] Dere! [*She holds one out to him.*] Dat is for you!

TOM

[*Rousing himself.*] Thanks. I — I don't take stimulants.

RITA

[*Very softly.*] Not even vhen *I* give dem — ? [*A pause. She holds out the glass and smiles. At last he takes it.*] Ah, dat is right! [*She lifts her own glass.*] Now vhat ve dreenk to — eh? [*Suddenly.*] *Ecco!* Dat nice ol' cler-gee-man — Saint Gile'! You don't like dat — no? [*She pauses and considers, gazing at him. At last, in a slow, mysterious whisper:*] Den 'ow you like it if *I* dreenk to vhat I see in *your* eyes — an' *you* dreenk to vhat you see in mine — ? [*A pause. She stares at him steadily with a mysterious smile. He cannot take his eyes away. Together they slowly lift their glasses to their lips and drink, their gaze never faltering. From downstairs can be heard very faintly the voices of the*

other singers, singing the sextette from "Lucia," with the orchestra accompaniment.]

TOM

[*Oddly.*] Who are you? Tell me — I — don't understand —

RITA

[*Slowly and mysteriously.*] I am a cup all full of sacred vine! I stan' upon an altar built of gol' an' pearls an' paid for vit' de blood an' tears of men! De steam of perfume dat fills all de air, it is de t'oughts of me in poets' 'earts — de vhite flowers lying at my feet, dey are de young boys' bee-eautiful deep dreams! My doors are open vide to all de vorld! I shine in dis great darkness like a living star, an' somevhere — sometime every man 'as 'eard my voice — "Come, all you t'irsty vones — come, dere is vine for all!" [*Pause.*]

TOM

What's your name?

RITA

Ah, vhy you ask?

TOM

[*Always looking at her.*] Because I want to see you again — and again — I want to ask you a million things I never dreamed about until tonight — [*His voice rising.*] I want to know you right down to the very bottom of your soul — I want to —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Ah, poor young man — all dat can never be.

TOM

It will —

RITA

No — no!

TOM

[*Rising.*] It *must* — it's *got* to be!

RITA

[*Gently.*] Ssh — ! Don' make a noise! [*Impulsively.*] Come 'ere! [*He comes up to the side of couch.*] Kneel down— [*As he does so.*] Dere — like dat! Close — close so ve can talk. [*Picking up her bouquet.*] You see my violets 'ere — so sveet an' fresh an' bee-eautiful? You see dem? Vell, 'ow long you t'ink dey las'?

TOM

A long time, if you treat them well.

RITA

Now look — ! [*She pulls the flowers in handfuls from the bouquet.*] I press dem on my face an' neck — I feel dere freshness on my eyes an' 'air — I dreenk dere sveetness like I dreenk new vine —

TOM

[*Warningly.*] You're crushing them!

RITA

What does it matter? I have keess dem — an' dey vere born to die! [*Taking up two great handfuls and covering his face with them.*] Dere — ! Take long breat's of dere fragrance! Let dem cool your lips an' fall like vhite snow on your face! Don' t'ink sad t'oughts of vhat mus' be —

jus' laugh an' love dem — dat is all dey need! [*Giving him more.*] Take dese — an' dese — take more — oh, take dem all — ! [*She throws a last handful into the air. The flowers fall all about them.*] Dere — ! [*Showing the bouquet holder.*] It is empty. Not vone is left to take 'ome vhen I go. You on'erstan'?

TOM

I don't know —

RITA

[*Tenderly.*] Our meeting 'ere tonight — vhat is it but a bunch of violets? Of flowers dat ve smell an' love an' t'row into de air? Vhy should ve take dem 'ome vit' us an' vatch dem die? I t'ink it is oh! much more vise to leave dem 'ere — like leetle memories — all sveet an' vhite an' scattered on de groun'.

TOM

Couldn't I keep — just one or two?

RITA

[*Smiling.*] Dey vere not meant for keeping. Dere whole life vas tonight!

TOM

[*Simply.*] I know — but I'd like to try. [*A little pause. She looks at him and shakes her head.*]

RITA

Ah, you are so young! [*She picks up a few flowers from where they have fallen and puts them in his buttonhole as he kneels beside her.*] Dere! [*Then, with her fingers still at his buttonhole.*] I vish — [*She hesitates.*]

TOM

What do you wish?

RITA

[*Very simply, almost like a child.*] I vish I knew some flowers dat vould never die. [*There is an instant's pause, then, quite suddenly, he seizes her hands and kisses them again and again.*]

RITA

[*Trying to rise.*] No — stop — vhat you do — ? [*She manages to tear herself away from him just as Van Tuyl appears on the stairs. He pauses at the top and looks at them. A brief pause.*]

RITA

[*With complete self-command.*] Ah, 'ow nize you are to come!

VAN TUYL

[*Politely.*] You're ready, madame?

RITA

Qvite, qvite ready. [*To Tom.*] T'ank you, m'sieur, for your kin' politeness. Good-bye. [*She bows to him and picks up her scarf, gloves, and fan, preparatory to departure.*]

TOM

[*Hoarsely.*] But I want to see you again.

RITA

You are — sure?

TOM

[*Gulping.*] Yes —

RITA

Qvite sure?

TOM

[*As before.*] Yes —

RITA

[*Very "femme du monde".*] Den vould you come to my 'otel tomorrow afternoon at four? It is de Brevoort 'Ouse — [*Pointing.*] Jus' over dere, you know.

TOM

[*With difficulty.*] All right —

RITA

[*Smiling.*] An' I vill take you for a leetle drive upon your bee-eautiful Fift' Avenue!

VAN TUYL

[*Always very polite.*] And *our* engagement, madame — what becomes of that?

RITA

Our leetle engagement is — is — 'ow you say?

VAN TUYL

Postponed?

RITA

[*Finishing.*] In-definite-lee. [*Van Tuyl bows. She moves towards the stairs.*]

TOM

[*Who has never taken his eyes from her now steps forward as he sees her leaving.*] Wait — ! I'm awfully sorry, but I — you know you haven't told me what your name is —

RITA

Oh, of course — I 'ave forget — so stupid! Vill you tell 'im — Meestaire Van Tuyl? [*She gives them each the most correct of smiles and bows, unconsciously dropping her handkerchief as she does so, then goes downstairs. As she goes, there is a murmur swelling up into loud applause which comes from below. She is smiling and kissing her hand to this unseen crowd as she disappears.*

A pause. Van Tuyl lights a cigar. Tom, staring after her, comes slowly to the top of the stairs, sees the handkerchief and picks it up. He is fingering it aimlessly when he sees the initials at one corner. He looks at them more carefully — and then turns dumbly to Van Tuyl. The orchestra begins below.]

VAN TUYL

[*Gently.*] Do you mean to say you really didn't know who she was?

TOM

[*Shaking his head and speaking almost inarticulately.*] No — I hadn't the least idea —

A WOMAN'S VOICE

[*Singing below.*] *"Non conosci il bel suol*
Che di porpora ha il, ciel?
Il bel suol ù de' rai
Son più tersi i colori?
" Ove l'aura è più dolce
Più lieve l'augel

. . . . . .

[*Tom walks slowly to the balustrade and stands there, looking down at the singer in the room below. Van Tuyl watches him rather sadly as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ROMANCE

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE: *New Year's afternoon. The study of St. Giles Rectory, a charmingly old-fashioned, spacious New York house, looking out upon a quiet street. The study is a square room. At the left are two windows, with heavy, rather faded curtains. In them hang holly wreaths, tied with scarlet bows. At the back is the double-doorway leading into the hall. At one side of it hangs the bell-rope. Over it is a long oar, and, above this, a mounted stag's head. At the right is the white marble mantel and fireplace, in which a fire is burning. On the mantel are several silver cups, medals in their open cases, little old-fashioned photographs of young men, a big old clock, and two handsome candelabra. Over the mantel is a large steel engraving of Del Sarto's St. John. Near the fireplace is a rack containing rods and guns. A pair of boxing-gloves hangs here, too. There are bookcases at the back, filled with sober, pious, dusty volumes. On top these bookcases are a few more engravings of old Masters — a Last Supper, etc. In one corner stands an old-fashioned cabinet, with glass-covered shelves and drawers below.*

In front of the windows is a very large, heavy table-desk; on it are a lamp, a water-pitcher and glass, desk-fittings, several books, a daguerreotype in a velvet case, a large, well-used Bible, a smaller Testament, etc. A big leather chair faces this desk. There are one or two other chairs near it. Across the room and placed so that the keyboard is not seen, is a small, but exquisite old-fashioned square piano. There are candles on each side of the keyboard and several rather worn volumes of bound music, neatly ranged. Near the

fireplace is a hair-cloth settee. All the furniture is old-fashioned black walnut, upholstered in black. An old-fashioned red carpet covers the floor.

The sunlight of a cold winter's afternoon comes through the windows. Outdoors the glitter of snow is seen. As the act goes on the sunlight changes to the ruddy glow of a winter's sunset, and then the twilight fills the room with shadows.

As the curtain rises Miss Armstrong, wearing a little black silk apron, is discovered arranging some roses in a bowl on the desk. The clock on the mantel strikes four.

[*The door opens and Giles, the old butler, appears.*]

GILES

Miss Van Tuyl. [*Susan enters, dressed in bonnet and mantle.*]

SUSAN

[*Coming in.*] Tom, I — [*Seeing Miss Armstrong.*] Oh, Happy New Year, Miss Armstrong!

MISS ARMSTRONG

Don't be premature, my dear — it's only New Year's Eve. [*Kissing her.*] What nice cold cheeks you have!

SUSAN

[*Laughing.*] I ought to — I've been walking. Tom asked me to come in at four, and hear about the final arrangements for tonight.

MISS ARMSTRONG

Tonight — ?

SUSAN

Yes. The midnight New Year's service for the lost and friendless.

MISS ARMSTRONG

Oh, *that!*

SUSAN

[*Enthusiastically.*] We're going to have a brass band and torches and sing hymns and parade the streets for half an hour beforehand — oh, it'll be wonderful! Is Tom upstairs?

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Nervously.*] No. He went out after luncheon — er — to pay a call.

SUSAN

[*Meaningly.*] At the Brevoort House?

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Flustered.*] Oh, I'm sure he'll be here if you wait a moment! He has a Deaconesses' Meeting at a quarter to five and I *know* he never would miss *that!*

SUSAN

Wouldn't he? Well, we'll see — [*Noticing the flowers.*] What lovely roses!

MISS ARMSTRONG

They're mine — they came just a moment ago. Without any card, too!

SUSAN

[*Chaffing her.*] Aha! An anonymous admirer — !

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Embarrassed and pleased.*] My dear, how foolish! But

you know it's the first time in years that anyone's sent me flowers, and —

[*There is the sound of sleighbells outside.*]

SUSAN

[*At the window.*] Oh, look! It's uncle's sleigh! He's driving his new team!

MISS ARMSTRONG

Is he getting out?

SUSAN

Yes. He's come to call for me on his way uptown. [*Glancing at clock.*] I wonder if Tom —

MISS ARMSTRONG

My dear, there's no telling when he'll be back. And as there's something I want to discuss with your uncle, I think you may as well go home.

SUSAN

Miss Armstrong, promise me not to tell him I came — unless he speaks of it himself, I mean. I don't want to be a drag on him. Oh, Miss Armstrong, promise — *please!*

MISS ARMSTRONG

Very well, my dear — if you insist. But what he really deserves is a good, plain talking to, and — [*Giles enters.*]

GILES

[*Announcing.*] Mr. Van Tuyl. [*He stands aside to let Van Tuyl pass.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Who wears a long fur coat and driving gloves.*] How d'you do, Miss Armstrong. Real New Year's Eve weather — eh? [*Taking off his coat and giving it to Giles.*] Well, Susannah! I thought I'd find you and Tom waving your arms and singing hymns and generally getting up steam for tonight's procession!

SUSAN

[*Smiling.*] Tom's out. Can Ralph take me home? [*She puts on her wraps.*]

VAN TUYL

Yes — good idea. I don't like to keep the horses standing. [*To Miss Armstrong.*] Have you seen my new team, Miss Armstrong? The prettiest sight in New York — [*At the window.*] Look at that off mare there! Isn't she a little witch? The highest stepper on the Avenue and a mouth like a French kid glove!

MISS ARMSTRONG

She looks very wild indeed! [*To Susan.*] Good-bye, my dear. Tell Ralph to be careful.

SUSAN

[*Kissing Miss Armstrong.*] Don't forget your promise. [*In a lower voice.*] And, dear, don't worry. *I* don't worry — I know it's going to be all right. [*She goes out.*]

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Turning from the door.*] Oh, Mr. Van Tuyl, I — I am in great — in very great distress!

VAN TUYL

Dear lady, what is it?

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Crying quietly.*] I'm ashamed to act like this — but — it's been so hard carrying it on my mind — all alone —

VAN TUYL

[*Soothingly.*] There — ! Count on me.

MISS ARMSTRONG

You're Tom's oldest friend — and his father's and mother's before him — and you're his leading parishioner, too — and the chairman of the vestry — [*She sniffs.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Comfortingly.*] I know — I know —

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Breaking down.*] Oh, save him, Mr. Van Tuyl — save him from that d-d-dreadful woman! [*She sobs.*]

VAN TUYL

I've done my best. He came to see me Saturday about the new gymnasium and I talked to him as I would have to my own son.

MISS ARMSTRONG

What did he say?

VAN TUYL

He was very sweet, but somehow he wasn't there — the real Tom, I mean — it was only the outside shell that I was speaking to.

MISS ARMSTRONG

I know! I've seen it! He's with *her!*

VAN TUYL

[*Reassuringly.*] Oh, come, Miss Armstrong! You mustn't be alarmed! Remember that she sails tomorrow morning, and — [*Glancing out window.*] Hello — !

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Stopping.*] What's the matter?

VAN TUYL

Why, her carriage is just stopping at your door!

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*In amazed horror.*] Not Madame Cavallini — ?

VAN TUYL

I rather think she's out to pay some calls. [*As Miss Armstrong goes and pulls the bell-rope.*] What are you going to do?

MISS ARMSTRONG

Tell Giles I'm out.

VAN TUYL

[*Frankly.*] Let her come in. Perhaps I could say a word or two —

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Earnestly.*] You'll make her promise not to write to him?

VAN TUYL

I'll do my best.

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Vehemently.*] There ought to be a law against such women! Why, I'd sooner have a hungry tigress walk into this room than —

GILES

[*At door.*] Madame Cavallini. [*He enters and stands aside to let her pass. She comes in quickly. She wears a wonderful black velvet dress, an ermine coat, and a little ermine hat. Around her neck is a long rope of pearls; at the end hangs a cross. In her arms, as if it were a baby, she carries a great ermine muff. From one end of this peeps a monkey's head, adorned with a scarlet satin turban, a long green aigrette and a diamond clasp.*]

RITA

[*To Miss Armstrong, shaking hands.*] My dear meess, 'ow you do? I come in for vone meenute jus' to say good-bye an' —

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Seeing monkey and drawing back with a cry.*] Oh — ! What's that — ?

RITA

What — ? [*Noting her look.*] An' I breeng my leetle bab-ee to show you. You like bab-ees — yes?

MISS ARMSTRONG

That's not — a baby?

RITA

[*Laughing.*] Oh, no — no — no! Vhat you t'ink? I call 'er bab-ee — because I am so — lonely — you too 'ave

no bab-ee, so you on'erstan' — yes? [*Seeing Van Tuyl.*] Oh — ! [*Advancing to him.*] 'Ow you do, Meestaire Van Tuyl? [*She shakes hands with him.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Shaking hands.*] How do you do? It seems a long time since we've met.

RITA

Dat night I sing at your so bee-eautiful *soirée!* To me, also, it seem a long, long time.

VAN TUYL

And Adelina — [*To the monkey.*] *Comment ça va, mademoiselle — hein?* I hope you find the weather not too cold — ?

MISS ARMSTRONG

Adelina — ?

RITA

Yes — because she look so much like Patti in *La Traviata.* [*To Van Tuyl.*] I t'ink she 'ave forget you, sir.

VAN TUYL

You ladies can forget so quickly.

RITA

Yes? Sometime — I vish you men forget a leetle — too! [*Taking the monkey out from muff.*] *Tesoruccio mio, sei quasi gelato — non importa qui fa caldo!* [*The tiny animal wears a fantastic costume of bright green satin. Her skirt is ornamented with large diamond buttons.*]

MISS ARMSTRONG

Why, it's all dressed up!

RITA

[*In surprise.*] But surely she is dress! Do you vant she go — 'ow you say? — naked? Dat vould be — ah! shockeeng!

MISS ARMSTRONG

Are those — real diamond buttons?

RITA

Yes. De prince de Chimay, 'e give 'er dose. So pretty — eh?

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Indignantly.*] I call it sinful waste — !

RITA

[*Wistfully.*] You don' like de monkee — no?

MISS ARMSTRONG

Certainly not — horrid little animals!

RITA

[*Warningly.*] Tschk — ! Tschk — ! You 'urt 'er feeling! *Ecco* — see — ! She begin to cry! [*Suddenly thrusting Adelina into Miss Armstrong's arms.*] Kiss 'er please — tell her you like 'er jus' vone leetle bit —

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Frantically.*] Stop it! How dare you — ? Take it away — oh! oh! It's going to bite me — *Mr. Van Tuyl* —

VAN TUYL

[*Taking the monkey.*] Come here, Adelina — there — that's right!

RITA

[*To monkey.*] *Bellezza mia! tu un' faresti male a nessuno!* [*Taking monkey.*] I t'ink she is like me, Meestaire Van Tuyl. [*With a reproachful glance towards Miss Armstrong.*] She is not 'appy when de peoples do not love 'er! [*Slipping the monkey into muff again.*] *Ti amo — bambinello mio — si — ti amo!*

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Watching her.*] Ugh!

RITA

[*Putting both muff and monkey in big chair by fire where neither can be seen.*] I put 'er 'ere an' she vill take vone leetle nap! [*Bending over chair.*] *Dormi, bambina cara di mammà — e stai là — buona, buona — finche mamma ti sveglia!* [*Rising and turning quickly to Miss Armstrong.*] *Santi!* I 'ave forget! I 'ave a somet'ing to tell you from Meestaire Tom!

MISS ARMSTRONG

You've seen him?

RITA

[*Innocently.*] But yes — 'e drive vit' me. I leave 'im at de — oh, vhat you say? — de parish 'ouse. 'E mus' spik to de con-firm-a-tion class — [*To Van Tuyl.*] What is dat? Con-firm —

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Interrupting.*] Isn't he coming home?

RITA

Yes — jus' a leetle vhile, 'e say. [*Holding out her hand*

to Miss Armstrong.] So I come firs' — to make my respec' to you, dear meess, an' say good-bye.

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Stiffly, to Van Tuyl, paying no attention to the outstretched hand.*] When Madame Cavallini goes, I hope you'll step up to my sitting-room and have a cup of tea? [*He bows.*]

RITA

[*Seeing the roses on the desk.*] A-ah! De roses — dey arrive all right? You like dem — yes? I 'ave choose each vone myself — ! [*She smiles winningly at Miss Armstrong.*]

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*Amazed.*] *You* sent me those — ?

RITA

[*Wistfully.*] Jus' a leetle surprise — to remember me two — t'ree days after I 'ave gone — so far!

MISS ARMSTRONG

[*After a speechless moment.*] Thank you — you were very kind. [*She goes over and takes up the bowl of roses from the desk.*] Mr. Van Tuyl will put you in your carriage whenever you're ready. Good-bye, madame, I wish you a pleasant voyage! [*She goes out at back.*]

RITA

[*Turning in wonder to Van Tuyl.*] What for she go avay so qveeck?

VAN TUYL

I asked her to. I said I wanted to talk to you alone.

RITA

[*Turning away.*] Yes? Could you not come to my 'otel?

VAN TUYL

I may be wrong, but I thought I wouldn't be received.

RITA

[*Not looking at him.*] Mebbe you are not so wrong.

VAN TUYL

Come here.

RITA

[*Coming up to him.*] What you vant? [*She looks at him and suddenly smiles.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling, too.*] You little monkey, you — [*Recovering himself.*] Now pretend for five minutes I'm your father confessor!

RITA

You vant to scold me — yes?

VAN TUYL

[*Taking her by the shoulders.*] Well, that depends — we'll see. Has Tom asked you to marry him?

RITA

[*After a little pause.*] No.

VAN TUYL

I'm glad. And if he did?

RITA

[*Not looking at him, speaking with a rather sulky defiance.*] I vould not marry 'im — an Amer'can cler-gee-man. 'E vould vant I stop singing an' be so frightful good an' live 'ere in dis 'orrible New York — mos' col' diz-a-gree'ble place I ever see — ! Adelina, in two — t'ree mont's she die — yes! An' 'e vould not let me go to Paris vhen I need de new dress — an' I vould be all bore — an' seeck — [*With a sniff.*] Mebbe *I* die, too — an' den — everyvone is glad — ! [*She dries her eyes resolutely with her handkerchief.*] Oh, no, my frien', I vould not marry 'im — no — no — dat vould be vone beeg meestake!

VAN TUYL

Then why do you lead the poor boy on?

RITA

Lead 'im — ?

VAN TUYL

He's not like the young gentlemen you're accustomed to have circling round you — remember that, my dear! He's not a Baron Vigier or a Captain Ponsonby or a — who was that little Pole who singed his wings so badly when you sang last spring in Brussels?

RITA

No, my frien' — no —

VAN TUYL

[*Interrupting.*] Well, isn't that pretty much the way you're treating him? Aren't you amusing yourself — just a little bit at his expense?

RITA

You do not on'erstan' — ah! it is so 'ard to say! Leesten — ! [*She speaks very seriously.*] 'Ow long I know 'im? Two mont's? Ver' vell — [*Solemnly.*] In all dat time 'e 'as not spik to me a vord of love — no, not vone leetle vord!

VAN TUYL

[*Amazed.*] What — ?

RITA

At first I try to *make* him — oh, you know — jus' for fun! An' den — some'ow — I am so sorry for 'im — an' I don't try any more! [*She sits on a hassock at his feet, leaning against his knees. He puts his hand on her shoulder.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Tenderly.*] My poor little Rita. Don't you know there's nothing in all this, dear, for you?

RITA

[*With a sigh.*] Oh, yes! I 'ave so often say, "Seelly voman, do not see 'im vhen 'e come today. Jus' tell de gentleman down-stair you vant to sleep an' no-bod-ee shall vake you up!"

VAN TUYL

Well, why didn't you?

RITA

I say no-bod-ee — like dat! No-bod-ee in all de vorld — [*Shamefacedly.*]—excep' jus' Meestaire Tom! [*With a sigh.*] *O Dio, come e dura la vita!*

VAN TUYL

So that's the way it went!

RITA

An' 'e come so much — oh! all de time! An' I cannot practice an' 'e take me for de valk in de Gran' Central Park. Vone day 'e keep me so late, dere is no re'earsal — yes, an' I sing dat night — ! Oh! It vas mos' terr'ble! [*Shyly.*] But also it vas — nize!

VAN TUYL

[*Softly.*] I know — I know —

RITA

An' den ve go 'ome to de 'otel an' I play for 'im — an' sing — sometime I tell de fortune vit' de card. An' 'e sit near an' spik of many t'ings!

VAN TUYL

What sort of things?

RITA

Oh, I dunno. Sometime vhat 'appen vhen 'e vas a leetle boy — an' vhat de bee-shop say about 'is vork — an' of de new geem-nas-i-um 'e 'ave build — an' so much of de poor peoples dat 'e vant to 'elp.

VAN TUYL

He talks of them to you?

RITA

[*Nodding.*] Oh, yes! An' I — I tell 'im vhat I t'ink!

I vonce vas poor — *I* know — *I* on'erstan'. [*Glancing up at him.*] I t'ink you smile a leetle — yes?

VAN TUYL

No, I'm not smiling, dear. [*Pause.*]

RITA

[*With a sigh.*] Ah, my frien', I am vone great big fool — I — who 'ave believe I vas so vise! [*She smiles and shakes her head.*]

VAN TUYL

Never mind, my dear. It's over now. You're leaving us tomorrow.

RITA

[*Glancing up.*] You t'ink 'e vill forget me — yes?

VAN TUYL

I'm sure you hope he will.

RITA

[*Looking off.*] I t'ink I vill not forget *'im* — or if I do it take a long, long time!

VAN TUYL

Ssh! Nonsense! [*Putting his hands over her eyes.*] Shut your eyes and think of all that's waiting for you over there! Rome. Just say it to yourself. Rome. Do you remember those last evenings on the terrace of the Villa d'Este? And inside the Abbé Liszt just playing and playing his — what did he call 'em? — "Consolations?" Do you remember that old piece of balustrade, and the Campagna, all purple like the twilight-laden sea? And

far away, like smoke against the sky, St. Peter's dome? And that's not all — there's Florence, and the olive-covered hills of Fiesole! You'll be there for the first breath of the spring! And Como with the snow still on the mountains! And Paris — why, you'll see the first acacias on the Boulevard St. Germain — you'll smell the lilacs when you're driving in the Bois — ! And Gounod will be there, and your dear old friend Rossini — ! Think of the dinners at the Maison Dorée, and the violets in the forest of Compiègne — ! Think of the suppers Cora Pearl will give! Do you remember when the Brohan poured her champagne down the prince's back? And Marianne de Murska — good old Gigi, too — why, don't you know what fun you're going to have?

RITA

Oh, dere is only vone t'ing dat I know!

VAN TUYL

What's that?

RITA

[*Passionately.*] I love 'im — I love 'im —

VAN TUYL

[*Covering her mouth with his hand.*] Ssh — ! Rita, you oughtn't to have come here today. It isn't right — it isn't fair to either of you.

RITA

But 'e ask me so many time!

VAN TUYL

If you don't look out, you're going to make him suffer a great deal.

RITA

[*Quickly.*] Ah — no — no!

VAN TUYL

[*Gently.*] It rests with you, my dear — his happiness or pain.

RITA

[*After a pause, rising.*] All right. I go now — befor 'e come.

VAN TUYL

You won't regret it, dear.

RITA

[*Unpinning a bunch of white violets from her wrap.*] So vhen 'e ask for me — jus' give 'im dese — an' say it is — *adieu* — [*She kisses the violets and holds them out to him. Just here the door opens and Tom bursts in, full of splendid spirits, utterly boyish and happy. He wears his overcoat and gloves.*]

TOM

[*Entering.*] Well, did you think I never was — [*Seeing Van Tuyl.*] Oh, is that you, sir? How do you do? [*Shaking hands.*] I'm glad Madame Cavallini hasn't been waiting here alone. Where's Aunt Emma?

VAN TUYL

Upstairs.

TOM

[*Pulling off his gloves.*] Whew — ! It's cold outside! I'm nearly frozen and I ran home, too! Those little rascals were so stupid — I wanted to spank the lot! [*Rubbing his*

hands.] Now I'll just put some more coal on the fire and then we'll all sit down and —

VAN TUYL

I think, Tom, Mme. Cavallini was just going when you came in.

TOM

[*Stopping.*] Going — ?

RITA

[*Recollecting herself.*] Yes, I mus' sleep a leetle before tonight — my las' performance — I so much vant to give my best — [*She has moved towards the door.*]

TOM

[*Running up and taking her hand.*] Oh, come now, you're not going!

RITA

[*Faltering.*] Please, Meestaire Tom, de performance —

TOM

[*Drawing her over to fire.*] Oh, that's all right — it's *Mignon* and you know it backwards.

RITA

[*Helplessly to Van Tuyl.*] You see —
[*Giles enters at back.*]

GILES

[*At door.*] Miss Armstrong's compliments, Mr. Van Tuyl, and tea is served in the sitting-room upstairs.

TOM

[*Quickly.*] Don't say we're here. We'll come up later. [*Van Tuyl looks at Rita.*]

RITA

[*Pleadingly.*] In jus' vone leetle vhile!

[*With a shrug, Van Tuyl turns and goes out. Giles closes the door after him.*]

TOM

[*With a sigh of pleasure as the door closes.*] There! Now isn't this fine? I tell you, it's like a dream come true!

RITA

Vhat dream, please?

TOM

You — here in *my* big armchair — in front of *my* fire — in *my* study!

RITA

[*Wistfully.*] A dream — ah, dat is vhat I am! A leetle dream dat lose 'er vay an' rest vone meenute in your sleeping 'eart.

TOM

One minute? Always!

RITA

[*Smiling.*] Ah no, my frien'. Tomorrow you vake up, an' pouf! dat leetle dream — she is all gone!

TOM

No — don't —

RITA

[*Softly.*] You 'ave been 'appy den, dese las' veeks — yes?

TOM

[*Lifting his eyes to hers.*] You know.

RITA

[*Very softly.*] I 'ave been 'appy too.

TOM

[*Impulsively.*] Don't go tomorrow!

RITA

What you say?

TOM

Stay on till spring!

RITA

But 'ave I not tell you I mus' sing in Rome nex' mont' — ? An' I go to Venice for de new opera Verdi 'ave compose —

Don't go — oh, please don't go!

RITA

An' den I mus' see Mapleson in London, an' de Russian concert tour begin in June —

TOM

I don't care — I just *can't* say good-bye!

RITA

[*Illumined.*] Den come vit' me!

TOM

[*Surprised.*] What?

RITA

Go qveeck an' buy de teecket —

TOM

Ticket — ?

RITA

[*Enthusiastically.*] Yes — before dey are all gone! — an' tomorrow ve put de clo'es in de box an' de box on de carriage an' drive to de *quai* an' oh! ve stan' on de boat — you an' me an' Adelina — an' ve vave de 'an'kerchief an' t'row de kiss an' laugh! — oh! my Lord, 'ow ve laugh at all de stupid peoples ve leave behin'! Vhat you t'ink of dat? *Hein?*

TOM

I think it's wonderful. But I've got a meeting of the Board of Charities tomorrow at eleven, and Patrick Crowley's funeral at twelve, and after dinner I offer my annual report to the Vestry Committee, and in the evening my Knights of the Round Table boys —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] I 'ave forget you are a clerg-ee-man.

TOM

And *I* forgot you were a Golden Nightingale. [*Pause.*]

RITA

[*Nodding to herself.*] I t'ink it is a ver' good t'ing I go avay tomorrow.

TOM

[*Much downcast.*] But you're coming back next year?

RITA

[*With a gesture.*] Ah, vhy talk about nex' year — it is so far avay!

TOM

In my profession, one has to think a great deal about things that are far away.

RITA

Den you are ver' foolish — [*As he starts to protest.*] — yes, you are! Leesten! I am ol' an' I know de vorld — so vhat I tell you now you mus' remember alvays.

TOM

Well?

RITA

[*Wistfully.*] Yesterday — it is a dream ve 'ave forget. Tomorrow — jus' de 'ope of some great 'appiness — some joy dat never come! Before, behin' — all clouds an' stars an' shadow — nodings, nodings dat is real — only de leetle meenute dat we call today!

TOM

[*Bitterly.*] Today's so short!

RITA

[*With a smile.*] Ah, you are young, my frien'! De time vill come vhen you are glad to 'ave dat leetle meenute — so glad you vould not t'ink to ask for more! [*Changing her tone.*] *Dio mio!* De 'ours, dey fly so fas'! [*Pointing to a*

chair.] Go sit down — fold your 'ands! Now ve vill see 'ow much Eetalian I 'ave teach you.

TOM

[*Disappointed.*] Oh, bother Italian! Don't let's waste time when —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] De lesson 'ave begin. [*Primly.*] *Buon giorno, signor.*

TOM

[*Sulkily.*] *Buon giorno, signora.*

RITA

Sta ella bene oggi?

TOM

[*With some difficulty.*] *Molto grazie io sono benissimo.*

RITA

[*Smiling.*] *Sono quelli i suoi istrumenti da pesca?* [*Pointing to case — right.*]

TOM

[*Not understanding.*] *Istrumenti da pesca?*

RITA

[*Imitating the act of fishing.*] 'Ow you say — for de feeshes?

TOM

[*Understanding.*] Oh, *fishing* rods!

RITA

Si — si! Le piace pescare?

TOM

[*Shaking his head.*] Er — I'm afraid I don't get it.

RITA

You lika to 'unt de feeshes?

TOM

[*Enthusiastically.*] *Do* I? Well, I should say! There's a stream up in the Adirondack Mountains — you'd just love those mountains! — where I landed ninety-four trout in one day! Ninety-four — what do you think of that?

RITA

Poor leetle feeshes!

TOM

[*Tolerantly.*] Oh, *they* don't mind. They *like* to be caught.

RITA

[*Pointing to the stag's head over the door.*] *E quel' cervo lo ha ammazzato lei anche quello?*

TOM

Did I shoot him, you mean?

RITA

Si — si.

TOM

[*Enthusiastically.*] Well, you'd better believe I did! I got him all myself and —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] *Oh, là — là! Badi! Italiano — Italiano!*

TOM

[*Pointing to himself proudly.*] *Io — tutti io* — guide three miles away! *Moltissimo grande* — biggest *bucko* that season — tried to gore me with those antlers, but I plugged him just in time — *molto sporto,* I tell *you!*

RITA

[*Clasping her hands.*] *Santa Madonna!* You mus' be careful please — mebbe some day you get 'urted!

TOM

[*With a slight swagger.*] Oh, no, I won't!

RITA

[*Looking over the door.*] An' de beeg oar — vhy you keep 'im dere?

TOM

[*Proudly.*] I pulled that oar in the best race Yale ever won! I was number six — we beat Harvard by quarter of a boat-length. That was '59 — my senior year. [*Anxiously.*] They didn't have anything about it in the European papers, did they? No — ? [*Looking at the oar.*] Well, it was a great race just the same!

RITA

[*Softly.*] I am so glad you vin!

TOM

[*Pleased.*] We wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for Dicky Parker. [*Going to the mantel and taking up a small photograph.*] He was our stroke — had the finest pair of legs in college, and as for his back — [*Reverently.*] — well, I

just wish you could see the muscles in his back! [*Giving her the picture.*] Here he is — he looks sort of foolish in that picture, though.

RITA

[*Looking at it.*] He look ver' nize.

TOM

[*Giving her another picture.*] And here's Dave Sterling. He played first base on the college team. Dave went to China last year as a missionary — [*Giving her another.*] And here's Frank Willis — he was killed at Gettysburg, you know — [*Suddenly seizing another in a frame at the end of the mantel.*] Oh, and here's Wallie Fletcher — he's the fellow I told you about, that used to spend his summers with me up at Peekskill before father sold the place.

RITA

[*Taking the picture.*] De leetle boy dat sveem across de rivair?

TOM

That's the one! Didn't we have good times though? We always went barefoot — used to pick up things with our toes. I could beat Wallie running and jumping, but of course he had me when it came to swimming — and then he could whistle through his teeth! Dear me, when I think of the hours I spent in the back pasture all by myself, just trying to whistle through my teeth!

RITA

[*Sympathetically.*] A-ah!

TOM

But I made up for it when I learnt to turn a back somer-

sault. Wallie used to rub himself every night with boiled angle-worms — he'd heard all acrobats did that — [*Suddenly.*] But there! I'm always talking about myself! Suppose you talk about *yourself* for a change?

RITA

Me — ?

TOM

Yes, tell me about some of the larks *you* used to have. The good times — you know what I mean!

RITA

[*A little timidly.*] De good time — ? I am afraid I did not 'ave dat ver' much — [*Suddenly.*] But vait! Yes, I remember vonce! My *baba* —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] What?

RITA

Dat mean my fader — 'e is dead — [*She closes her eyes, says something under her breath in Latin, crosses herself and then resumes brightly.*] — ve live in vone leetle room ver', ver' 'igh up — Calle San Polo on de Zattere. Vone morning de *baba*, 'e feel seeck — ve 'ad not anyt'ings to eat — so I mus' leave 'im qveeck an' go an' sing to get de money. An' I sing an' sing, but no vone vill give nodings, an' de bad boys dey laugh, an' t'row de dirt at me, an' vone of dem, 'e break my guitar! An' de night come, an' I am so tired I don't know vhere I go or vhat I do — an' den I fin' myself before de 'Otel Danieli. An' I try to sing — but no vone leesten, an' de tears dey come so fas' I cannot see — an' jus' den I 'ear a voice say "Don' cry please!" I don'

on'erstan' de Engleesh den, but I look up an' a leetle girl, all dress in vhite, she lean ovair de balcony an' smile at me an' drop an envelope an' in de envelope vas — vhat you t'ink? — a bee-autiful bright piece of gol'! An' de tears, dey 'ave an en', an' I smile up at de leetle girl, an' keess my 'an' an' run avay an' oh! dat night I cook a — 'ow you say? — a great beeg deesh of nize, fat, dee-licious fried eel! Dat suppair, it come back to me in dreams an' I seet again on de broken stool an' eat an' eat, an' de *baba*, 'e make de joke an' oh! my Lord, I am so *glad!* An' den I vake up — an' feel de pearls aroun' my neck — an' I cry — because it vas so long ago! [*Slight pause.*]

TOM

[*Whispering.*] You poor little thing —

RITA

[*Coming back to herself.*] So you see I 'ave de good time, too!

TOM

[*Unsteadily.*] You — poor little thing — [*He rises and comes to her.*]

RITA

Vhat you say?

TOM

[*Passionately.*] Madam Cavallini — Margherita — I —

RITA

[*Shrinking from him in sudden nervousness.*] No — no —
[*Just here a hand-organ strikes up outside the window, playing the old waltz — "Il Bacio."*]

TOM

[*Startled and furious.*] Drat that hurdy-gurdy!

RITA

[*Slyly.*] I t'ink it come jus' in time!

[*Tom goes over to the window where he looks out. Meanwhile Rita is dancing lightly and gaily about the room, whistling and snapping her fingers in time with the waltz.*]

TOM

[*Opening the window and calling outside.*] Hi! [*Pause. The waltz continues.*] Hi! — you there! Stop that racket! Stop it this minute! [*The waltz breaks off in the middle of a phrase.*] We don't allow any Italian mountebanks in the neighborhood of this church and if you don't — [*Suddenly spluttering with rage.*] *Take that monkey off my gate!*

RITA

Monkee — ? [*She runs up to the window, and calls gaily outside.*] *Buon giorno, amico!* [*Tom stands petrified, staring at her.*] *Che tesoro di una scimmietta avete! Come si chiama?* [*The man calls back something in Italian.*] *Hein? Tommaso — ?* [*To Tom.*] You an' de monkee 'ave de same name! [*Calling outside.*] *Quanti anni ha?* [*The man answers. She turns to Tom.*] 'E is two year ol'. [*Calling.*] *Ha delle pulci?* [*The man answers.*] *Davvero?* [*To Tom.*] 'E use to 'ave de flea, but now 'e eat dem all.

TOM

[*Much annoyed.*] Really, I —

RITA

[*Suddenly struck with an idea and calling outside with*

mysterious importance.] *Aspettate un momento — voglio farvi veder qualche cosa!* [*She runs across the room, picks up her own monkey and returns to the window.*] I make acqvainted Tommaso vit' Adelina!

TOM

[*Trying to stop her.*] Please, madame — remember my parishioners —

RITA

[*Holding up Adelina at the window and calling outside.*] *Ecco — ! Tommaso, questa è Adelina — siete compatrioti!* [*To Adelina.*] *Sii carina e saluta Tommaso — colla tua manina —* [*Waving a hand for her.*] *Brava — cosi!* [*To the organ-grinder.*] *E voi, amico, come vi chiamate?* [*The man answers. She turns again to Tom.*] De gentleman's name is Meestaire Francesco Guerra. [*Calling outside.*] *Da che provincia venite?* [*To Tom.*] 'E come from Napoli. [*Calling.*] *Da quanto tempo siete in questo paese?* [*To Tom, as the man answers.*] 'E been 'ere vone year an' 'e vant like 'ell to go back! [*Calling.*] *Quanti bambini avete?*

TOM

[*Firmly.*] Madame, you'll catch your death of cold!

RITA

[*Turning to Tom.*] 'E 'ave five children an' anodder vone come nex' mont'!

TOM

[*Angrily.*] Tell him to go away, do you hear? Tell him to go away immediately!

RITA

[*To Tom.*] All right — give me de money —

TOM

[*Protesting.*] You're not going to — [*Meekly taking out his purse.*] Will ten cents do?

RITA

Qveeck — qveeck before 'e go avay! [*She snatches the purse out of his hand and throws it out the window, calling as she does so:*) *Ecco — guardate bene dove cade — comperate qualche cosa pei bambini! Buona fine e buon principio, amico!* [*Waving her handkerchief.*] *Arrivederci!* [*She smiles and kisses her hand at the departing organ-grinder.*]

TOM

[*Coldly.*] You talk to that man as if you'd known him all your life!

RITA

[*Turning away from the window with a little sigh and shrug.*] Ah, ve bot' make de music! [*Suddenly seeing the daguerreotype on the desk.*] Who is dat young lady?

TOM

That's my mother. [*Slight pause.*]

RITA

You let me look at 'er — yes?

TOM

Of course. [*She takes up the picture very tenderly and studies it.*]

RITA

[*Softly.*] Oh, she is bee-eautiful!

TOM

[*Coming up and looking at it over her shoulder.*] That was taken before she was married. My father always had it on his dressing-table.

RITA

[*Always gazing at the picture.*] I t'ink you look like 'er.

TOM

[*Looking at it, too.*] She died when I was fifteen. It was my first winter at boarding school. She'd come up to see me only two weeks before and brought me this — [*Picking up a small, worn book from desk.*] — my little Testament. I'd expected a fruit-cake — you can imagine how I felt! But now — [*He brushes it lovingly.*] — there's nothing else I value quite so much!

RITA

[*Whispering.*] She look like she 'old somet'ing in 'er 'eart — somet'ing dat make 'er 'appy — an' dat no vone know — [*Slight pause.*] Per-aps — per'aps it is de t'ought dat vone day she 'ave a son — like you —

[*Tom has crossed the room and is unlocking a drawer in the corner-cabinet.*]

RITA

[*Under her breath, to the picture.*] Forgive — [*She kisses it, then puts it back carefully on desk.*]

TOM

[*Returning with a little box.*] There's something here I've been meaning to show you — [*He is opening the box and fumbling about in it.*] I keep it in this box with mother's little souvenirs — [*He has taken out a tiny, shabby, little shoe*

and put it on the desk to get it out of the way.] Where on earth — [*Suddenly.*] Oh, yes! [*He takes out a small package done up carefully in tissue paper.*]

RITA

[*Picking up the shoe as she interrupts.*] An' dis — ?

TOM

[*Glancing at it.*] That? Oh, I believe that's my first shoe. [*His tone softening as he looks at it.*] Funny little thing — look! It's all worn out at the toes!

RITA

[*Half-laughing, half-crying.*] Oh! — oh, I t'ink it is so sveet! [*She clasps it to her heart.*]

TOM

[*Taking a little envelope from the box and giving it to her.*] Here's something else, too!

RITA

[*Tremulously, as she takes.*] What — ? oh, what you — [*Reading slowly from the envelope.*] "Curl saved from my son Thom-as Arm-strong's first 'air-cut — June seex — eighteen 'undred an' forty-vone — "

TOM

[*Smiling.*] Let's see — I must have been three years old!

RITA

[*Who has taken out the curl.*] Oh, look! De leetle curl — it is so soft — an' yellow — jus' like gol' —

TOM

I was blonde when I was young — you'd never think it now, would you?

RITA

[*Half-laughing, half-crying.*] An' she 'ave keep it in dis envelope an' write upon it — "Curl from my son Thom-as" — [*She cannot go on.*]

TOM

[*Half apologetic.*] She did that because she was very sentimental.

RITA

[*Bursting out.*] She did it because she love you such a much!

TOM

Here's what I really wanted to show you, though. [*He is unwrapping the little package he has been holding in his hand. Rita kisses the curl and puts it back in its envelope with great care.*] Now! Look at those!

RITA

[*Looking.*] A necklace — earrings —

TOM

They were father's wedding present! [*He holds up the necklace — it is made of seed pearls and has a locket.*] There! Isn't that pretty?

RITA

[*Admiringly.*] Oh, mos' ver' pretty!

TOM

There's one of my baby pictures in the locket. [*Trying*

to open locket.] I wonder how — oh, yes, I remember — you press the back and then it opens! There — ! [*He gives her the locket. She takes it eagerly, looks at it, glances at him, then breaks out into irrepressible laughter.*] What's the matter?

RITA

[*Trying to control herself.*] You are so — so *fat!*

TOM

[*Frowning.*] Fat — ?

RITA

You 'ave such beeg cheek — jus' like dis — [*She puffs up her own cheeks, loses her breath and starts laughing again.*]

TOM

[*Severely.*] I believe I was considered a *very* beautiful baby!

RITA

You are de mos' funny baby I ever see in all my life!

TOM

[*Coldly.*] Oh, very well. I'm sorry I showed it to you! I might have known that —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Ah, don' be angry.

TOM

[*Not turning.*] I'm *not* angry!

RITA

So? Den von' you turn your 'ead — please? [*Slight*

pause.] I go avay tomorrow! [*Slight pause.*] Mebbe I never come back! [*Long pause. Then dreamily.*] I t'ink you are de mos' bee-eautiful baby in de whole vorld.

TOM

[*Loftily.*] No, you don't either.

RITA

[*Eagerly.*] *So — si!* It is true! [*Softly to the picture.*] So good-bye, leetle fat boy — good-bye — good-bye! [*She kisses it twice.*]

TOM

[*Turning and seeing her.*] Thank you.

RITA

[*Shutting the locket.*] Dat vas for *'im*, my frien' — not you! [*She holds out the necklace for him to take.*]

TOM

[*Embarrassed.*] Er — don't you want to keep him then?

RITA

Keep 'im?

TOM

Yes, and the necklace, too. I wish — I mean I hope you will.

RITA

But no — I cannot —

TOM

Please — just as a favor to me!

RITA

It is your moder's —

TOM

[*Eagerly.*] I know — that's why!

RITA

But she vould not like it —

TOM

[*A little pompously.*] Of course I realize how you feel about accepting presents of jewelry from men, but I think in this case — it's — er — *quite* all right! [*Her hand has gone instinctively to her string of pearls.*] What are you doing?

RITA

[*Unclasping her own pearls.*] I make for it de place! [*She drops her string of pearls on the desk.*]

TOM

[*Heartily.*] Aha! I knew you would! [*Giving her the rest of the package.*] Here! take the earrings, too!

RITA

[*With tender enthusiasm.*] *Dio mio!* dey are so bee-eautiful!

TOM

Can you see to put them on? [*By this time the room is filled with twilight shadows. The firelight is warm and mellow.*]

RITA

[*Standing on a footstool before the mantel and looking into*

the glass.] Oh, yes, I can see! [*She takes off her own earrings, lays them on the mantelpiece and begins putting on his earrings and necklace. He watches her.*]

TOM

You know how it clasps?

RITA

[*Busy with the necklace.*] Yes, it is all right — [*Finishing it, and turning gaily to him.*] *Ecco!* Are dey not be-coming? [*He does not answer.*] Vhy you look at me like dat? Vhat you t'ink of — *hein?*

TOM

[*Simply.*] I was just thinking how mother would have loved you.

RITA

Yes?

TOM

She loved everything that was beautiful and sweet and good. And then your music would have interested her so much! *She* was musical, too, you know.

RITA

Is dat so?

TOM

[*Continuing.*] Yes, that's why I kept her piano when the Worth Street house was sold. I put it over there — so when I'm writing sermons and get all mixed-up, I can just look at it and imagine I'm eight years old again and hear her dear voice singing *Annie Laurie.*

RITA

[*Softly.*] "An-nee Laur-ee?"

TOM

That was her favorite song. [*Hesitating.*] I wish — I wish you'd sing it once before you go.

RITA

I tell you vhat — *I* play an' *you* vill sing!

TOM

[*Embarrassed.*] But I can't — I haven't any voice —

RITA

Come — vhere is it — in dis book? [*She takes up one of the bound volumes of music lying on the piano.*]

TOM

No — the big one underneath — page 27 — but really — it's foolish — the idea of my trying to —

RITA

[*Finding it.*] Ah! Now light de candle, please. [*She puts the volume on the rack.*]

TOM

[*Lighting a long paper "spill" from fire and from it lighting the candles on either side of the keyboard.*] It goes up to E — that's pretty high, you know. Of course I wouldn't mind if you weren't a professional. I always help Mr. Gates with the choir, but they're not very critical. [*Taking up his position by her side.*] Give me the note when you come to it.

RITA

[*Playing the little prelude.*] Is dat too fas'?

TOM

A little bit — that's better! [*She strikes his note and pauses, glancing up at him. He hesitates.*] Just wait till I clear my throat — [*He coughs.*] It's so long since I've sung! Now I'm ready — go ahead! [*He sings, she "conducting" him with her head and one hand whenever possible.*]

"Maxwelton braes are bonnie
Where early fa's the dew,
And it's there that Annie Laurie
Gie'd me her promise true."

[*Hastily clearing his throat and speaking.*] This is where it goes up! [*Resuming the song.*]

"Gie'd me her promise true,
Which ne'er forgot will be
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me down and deel"

RITA

[*Playing.*] Bravo! Bravo! You sing ver' nize!

TOM

[*Flattered.*] I'll do better with the next verse — see if I don't! [*Singing.*]

"Her brow is like the snawdrift,
Her throat is like the swan,
Her —"

[*Just here Giles opens the door at back.*]

GILES

I beg pardon, sir. The Deaconesses.

TOM

Get rid of 'em!

GILES

What, sir?

TOM

[*Impatiently.*] I said get rid of 'em!

[*Giles bows and goes out closing the door. Tom resumes the song.*]

"Her face it is the fairest
That e'er the sun shone on.
That e'er the sun shone on,
And dark blue is her e'e
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'll lay me down and dee!"

RITA

[*Softly, not looking up at him.*] It is a song of love.

TOM

Yes. But I never knew it until now. Do you know why?

RITA

No. Tell me.

TOM

Because I never knew what love was — until now.

RITA

[*Sadly.*] An' what is love — to you? [*She plays a little, idly, as she watches him.*]

TOM

[*Leaning on the piano.*] It's finding the woman you want to live with all your life. The woman who'll show you the right way and follow it with you, side by side, shoulder

to shoulder, making all the good things seem a little better, and all the hard things — well, not quite so hard. It's knowing she'll be with you at your journey's end, when you're old, and she's old, and you can smile and look into each other's eyes and say "We've done our work together, dear — and I think we've done it well."

RITA

[*After a little pause, her eyes full of tears.*] Oh, my frien', dat love, it is for some, yes — but it is not for me.

TOM

I don't understand —

RITA

[*Wistfully and tenderly.*] For me, love is jus' a leetle light in all dis darkness, a leetle varmt' in all dis col', a leetle flame dat burn — not long, an' den go out. A star dat come an' is so bee-eautiful it bring beeg tears, an' vhen ve dry de eyes an' look again — de star is gone. I t'ink it is to be a leetle 'appier togedder den ve are apart — vone meenute to lie still in de beloved's arms — vone leetle meenute to forget, my frien' — an' dat is all.

TOM

[*Brokenly.*] My dear — [*He comes swiftly to her and puts his hands on her shoulders.*]

RITA

[*Rising.*] No — no —

TOM

[*Whispering.*] My dear — my dear — [*He draws her to him and holds her tightly in his arms.*]

RITA

Oh, vhat you do?

TOM

[*Pressing her to him.*] I love you!

RITA

Don' —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] And you love me. Now say it —

RITA

[*Piteously.*] No —

TOM

[*Through his teeth.*] You *must* —

RITA

[*Throwing her arms about his neck with deep abandon.*] All right — *I love you* — ! Now ve are alone — you 'ear — an' dere is nodings in de vorld but you an' me! Dis is our time — our leetle meenute dat vill never come again — so shut your eyes — an' 'old me close — an' *love*—

TOM

But, dear, I —

RITA

[*Putting her mouth to his.*] Ssh! [*A long kiss. They stand motionless, locked in each other's arms. And just here from the parish house next door comes the sound of an organ and men's voices singing "Ein Feste Burg" — all very faint and far away.*]

RITA

[*At last.*] Vhat is dat?

TOM

It's just the choir — they're practising for tonight — I love you.

RITA

[*Closing her eyes.*] A-ah!

TOM

When will you marry me? [*She slowly disengages herself from him and turns away.*]

RITA

[*Almost to herself.*] I 'ave not t'ink de en' vould be so soon.

TOM

[*Eagerly.*] When — please tell me when?

RITA

Ask me anodder time — no, never ask me — it is jus' not possible —

TOM

But what's the matter? I don't understand!

RITA

[*Defending herself.*] Vhy you in such a 'urry? You mus' vait!

TOM

[*Coming nearer her.*] I'd wait forever — if there's any hope.

RITA

[*Retreating.*] Please don' come near —

TOM

There *is* hope — isn't there?

RITA

No — no — I 'ave make vone beeg meestake!

TOM

What — ?

RITA

I 'ave let you spik vords dat I mus' never 'ear —

TOM

My darling, I —

RITA

I t'ink I 'ave been mad for jus' vone leetle vhile, but now — I cannot marry you. Good-bye. [*She goes towards door. He stops her.*]

TOM

Why not?

RITA

Oh, let me go!

TOM

Not till you've told me why.

RITA

Can you not on'erstan' vhat is so plain an' clear? Your frien's — dey know. De night I meet you you 'ave see de young men look at me — you 'ave see dere vives an' modders frown an' turn avay —

TOM

Rita — ! [*He has guessed her meaning.*]

RITA

Dey know vhy I can never marry you — de whole vorld knows — [*Her voice softening.*] An' now I t'ink if you don' min' — I go avay. [*There is a pause. Tom controls himself.*]

TOM

[*Very tenderly.*] No, my dear — not yet. [*He leads her to settee by fire.*] I think — I think you have something to tell me.

RITA

I cannot — no — please do not ask —

TOM

[*Always tender.*] I'm not going to ask — I'm just going to sit here and hold your hand and listen. [*He takes her hand.*] That's what I'm here for, you know — just to help people when they're in trouble and need a friend.

RITA

You are so good!

TOM

[*Quite pale.*] No, I'm not — but you'll find I'm very sympathetic. Why, I remember one day last week — Tuesday, it was, that a little tenement girl named McDougal, came in to see me. We sat here just as we're sitting now and after a while she told me all about it. She was going to be married the next day to a young carpenter over on 8th Street — but there was something she hadn't told him — poor child! She didn't dare. She'd been — treated badly by some brute of man when she was only sixteen years old. Of course he'd left her — and she'd tried to put together the pieces of her life and go on with her

work — and then she met the carpenter and fell in love and was going to marry him — and at the last moment her conscience began bothering her — so she came to me.

RITA

An' — vhat you tell 'er?

TOM

Oh, I didn't say much! I just suggested things here and there, and in the end — God bless her! She made up her mind to do the right thing.

RITA

De right — ?

TOM

She went home and told him all about it.

RITA

An' den — ?

TOM

[*Cheerfully.*] He was a decent sort of fellow and he loved her, so of course he understood — and — well, I married them Wednesday morning and now they're two of the happiest people in New York!

RITA

An' vould *you* feel dat vay, too?

TOM

Me?

RITA

If somevone dat you love — [*Quickly.*] no, don't look at

me! — [*Resuming.*] If somevone dat you love come an' say "I am not good — I mus' tell you now because ve love each oder! You are de first man I 'ave ever love — you are de first man I 'ave ever tol'!"

TOM

Well?

RITA

Could you forgive 'er — Meestaire Tom?

TOM

Forgive her — ? [*Brokenly, as he catches her in his arms.*] You poor little child!

RITA

[*Wailing.*] No — no — you do not on'erstan' — it is *I* who am not good —

TOM

[*Soothing her.*] There, darling, there! Don't cry. It's all right. You've been fair and brave and honest. You've told me and I forgive you from the bottom of my heart!

RITA

[*Still sobbing.*] Oh — ! Oh! I do not see 'ow it is possible — no, I do not see — I don' — I don' —

TOM

Why not? It was a long time ago, wasn't it? When you were poor and struggling and lonely. You didn't know anything about the world — how could you? And you had to live — hunger and misery were right behind you, driving you on —

RITA

Yes — oh, yes —

TOM

But you mustn't think of it any more! You must just remember how afterwards you pulled yourself together and raised your head and said to yourself, "I may have sinned, but that's all over — and from now on I'm going to be a good woman! I'm going to turn the rest of my life into a splendid, beautiful thing! I won't stop until I can be proud of myself!" And oh, my dear — I'm so glad — I'm so glad that you can be — now!

RITA

An' is dat vhy you can forgive me?

TOM

Is what, dear?

RITA

Because it 'appen — so long ago?

TOM

[*With a touch of his profession.*] I naturally believe that all sins, finished and truly repented of, should be forgiven by every Christian man or woman.

[*Pause.*]

RITA

[*Gently releasing herself.*] I see — I see! [*She rises and walks away.*]

TOM

[*With an effort to shake off all these ugly things.*] And now

that everything's cleared up between us, do you know what we're going to do?

RITA

No. Tell me.

TOM

[*Smiling.*] Go right upstairs, of course, and announce our engagement to Aunt Emma and Mr. Van Tuyl. Come on!

RITA

[*Instinctively.*] No — no — not now —

TOM

What — ?

RITA

Vait a leetle — vait until tomorrow —

TOM

But you're sailing tomorrow!

RITA

Yes — dat is vhy —

TOM

[*Smiling.*] Nonsense! If you don't look out, I'll begin to think you're ashamed of me! Come along! [*He puts his arm about her waist.*]

RITA

[*Holding back.*] No, I say — it is too soon — I am not ready — ve mus' vait —

TOM

Wait? What for?

RITA

Mebbe — mebbe dey do not like it vhen ve tell dem!

TOM

Now don't you bother about Aunt Emma! She —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Ah, no! I do not bodder about *'er!* But — [*She stops.*]

TOM

It surely isn't Mr. Van Tuyl that's worrying you? Why, he's my oldest friend — and father's and mother's, too. He's just like one of the family! Of course we must tell him right off!

RITA

Vhy don' you let *me* tell 'im?

TOM

What?

RITA

Tonight — vhen I can see 'im all alone! [*Eagerly.*] Oh, please — please let me tell 'im!

TOM

[*Puzzled.*] But why? What's the matter?

RITA

If ve tell 'im now, 'e vill be so angry!

TOM

Nonsense! And even if he is, we don't care!

RITA

'E vill say t'ings about me — oh yes, 'e vill!

TOM

But he doesn't *know* anything about you. [*She doesn't answer. He repeats in a different tone.*] Rita, he doesn't *know* anything about you, does he?

RITA

No — I mean — not ver' much —

TOM

What — ?

RITA

Jus' a leetle — I tell 'im a leetle vone night in Paris —

TOM

You don't mean — what you've told *me?*

RITA

Yes, an' so if ve go upstairs now an' —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] But you said just a minute ago that I was the only man you'd ever told — because I was the only man you'd ever loved!

RITA

[*Frightened.*] I 'ave forget — oh, it vas two — t'ree years ago —

TOM

[*Thinking.*] But wait! He's talked to me very openly

about you — why, only last Saturday when I went to see him about the new gymnasium —

RITA

Vhat — ?

TOM

He used every possible argument — except that one. Why, he never said so much as a word against —

RITA

I know. I — I ask 'im not to.

TOM

[*More and more surprised.*] You — ? But — but he wouldn't take your side where *I'm* involved — why, it's incredible!

RITA

Oh, yes, 'e vould — you do not know!

TOM

But why ?

RITA

[*Fighting for time.*] Vhy — ?

TOM

Yes — there must be a reason.

RITA

Can you not guess?

TOM

No.

RITA

It is because — oh, long ago, you on'erstan' — 'e was foolish enough to like me — jus' a leetle —

TOM

What — ?

RITA

[*Quickly.*] It was not my fault — I cannot 'elp it vhen peoples —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] When was this?

RITA

Oh, two — t'ree year ago! I did my bes' to stop 'im — but it vas not easy, I tell you dat!

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] Did he want you to marry him?

RITA

[*Trying to speak lightly.*] No — no — it was nodings — nodings at all — 'e jus' like to sen' me flowers an' 'ear me sing an' —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] How long did his — attentions last?

RITA

I — I dunno.

TOM

[*Going towards her.*] You don't mean he's in love with you *still?*

RITA

[*With abandon.*] Oh, don't talk about dat any more! Jus' take me in your arms an' kiss me till —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] And you knew he felt that way — you knew it all this time?

RITA

Yes — I knew —

TOM

Then why didn't you tell me?

RITA

I did not t'ink you vould — like it.

TOM

Like it! Why, it was all right! He can't help loving you, I suppose. There isn't anything to conceal — [*Stopping suddenly.*] Rita, there isn't anything to *conceal?*

RITA

Vhat — ?

TOM

Tell me there isn't — tell me —

RITA

[*Retreating.*] I don' know vhat you mean —

TOM

Quick — for the love of God!

RITA

Don' look at me —

TOM

Not Mr. Van Tuyl? *Not he* — ?

RITA

[*Terrified.*] Please — oh, please —

TOM

[*With a sudden cry.*] *Oh* — !

RITA

[*Frantically.*] It is not true! I say it is not true!

TOM

What — ?

RITA

Dere 'as been nodings — you make vone terr'ble mees-take —

TOM

How do I know?

RITA

[*Striking her breast.*] *I* tell you — *I!*

TOM

But you kept back something before —

RITA

No —

TOM

How do I know you're not doing it again?

RITA

No — I am not! I tell you I am not!

TOM

[*Pulling himself together.*] Ssh — be quiet! They'll hear you upstairs. [*His voice shaking.*] Now we must be calm, both of us, — quite calm and sensible. We must settle this matter here, once and for all. If it's true, I — I beg you — for both our sakes — as you will answer on the Day of Judgment — I beg you to tell me now. [*Pause.*]

RITA

If I say "Yes, it is true!" would you — would you again forgive me?

TOM

[*With a cry.*] Ah — ! then it *is* — it *is* —

RITA

[*Wildly.*] No — no —

TOM

Will you swear it?

RITA

Yes — I vill swear.

TOM

Put your hand here — on my mother's Testament.

RITA

[*Obeying him.*] So?

TOM

And look me in the eye and say after me —

RITA

Yes?

TOM

"I swear there has been nothing wrong between Mr. Van Tuyl and me."

RITA

[*Faintly.*] *O Madonna — !*

TOM

[*Harshly.*] Swear it!

RITA

[*Opening her eyes.*] What — ?

TOM

You won't — ?

RITA

"I svear — dere 'as been" — vhat you say? — "nodings wrong betveen — Meestaire Van Tuyl — an' me — " [*She sways a little.*]

TOM

[*With a sob of relief, as he catches her in his arms.*] Oh, my darling — forgive me — I've been a brute to doubt you — I'm — [*Suddenly.*] What's the matter? Rita — *Rita !* [*Her head has fallen. She has fainted. He carries her over to the settee, lays her on it, runs to the desk, pours out a glass of water, returns with it, kneels by her side and tries to make her drink.*] My poor little girl — there — it's all right — I'm never going to bother you again — forgive me — oh, my darling, just forgive me this once — [*She is gradually reviving under his caresses and endearments.*] I was out of my head — I didn't know what I was saying — please —

please — [*She sits up dizzily.*] What's the matter? Aren't you going to speak to me — ? [*She rises unsteadily to her feet.*] *Rita* — ! [*He takes her hand.*]

RITA

Let me go!

TOM

But, darling, just listen to me for a moment —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] I vant to go avay — you don' believe me — you don' love me —

TOM

Yes, I do! I love you more than anything in the world — I love you and I'm going to marry you —

RITA

No — no — I vill never marry you now — never — never any more —

TOM

Rita — !

RITA

[*With passion.*] Vhy you make me to svear dose t'ings? Vhy you make me — ?

TOM

Forgive me, dear — please —

RITA

I vill never forgive you. Good-bye.

TOM

No, wait! [*He stops her at door, taking both her hands.*]

RITA

I say — good-bye! [*He stares into her face. Her eyes drop.*] Oh, let me go please! I mus' return to de 'otel — it is so late — you know I alvays sleep before I sing an' — [*Suddenly.*] Vhat for you look at me like dat?

TOM

[*Trying to control himself.*] I believed you when you swore just now — I want it understood that I believed you —

RITA

Vell?

TOM

So — if you don't mind — I think — I think — I'll ask Mr. Van Tuyl to come down here —

RITA

Vhat — ?

TOM

And then we'll tell him — we're engaged.

RITA

[*In a sudden fright.*] Ah, no — no — don' do dat — please — I ask you — jus' for me — vait a leetle vhile —

TOM

[*With a sudden wildness, pulling the bell-rope violently.*] Not a minute! Not a second!

RITA

Please —

TOM

I won't!

RITA

No — no —

TOM

Oh, my God —
[*Pause. A knock.*]
Come in!
[*Enter Giles.*]

GILES

You rang, sir?

TOM

Yes. Ask Mr. Van Tuyl to step down here, please. Tell him I'll keep him only a moment.

GILES

Very good, sir.
[*Exit Giles.*]

RITA

[*As the door closes.*] Ver' vell. You vill tell him alone. I vill not stay.

TOM

[*Before door.*] You've got to.

RITA

What — ?

TOM

I won't let you out.

RITA

Remembair my performance —

TOM

[*Snapping his fingers.*] I don't give *that* for your performance!

RITA

'E come — I 'ear 'im — [*In desperation.*] O, let me go — *let me go!*

TOM

[*As if struck.*] Rita — don't tell me you're *afraid* —

RITA

Go avay — let me see 'im first — for jus' vone leetle meenute — it vill be all right —

TOM

[*His suspicions returning.*] I won't —

RITA

[*Wildly.*] Ver' vell den. I don' care! [*She sits down at the piano and bursts into a Chopin polonaise. The door opens and Van Tuyl appears.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Genially as he enters.*] Ah — ! Still here? We thought you'd — [*Noticing Tom's face.*] Why, what's the matter, Tom? [*Rita stops playing and sits at the piano, looking at the two men.*]

TOM

[*Trying to speak naturally.*] Nothing, sir. I — asked you to come down because — I wanted you to be the first to know of my good luck.

VAN TUYL

Good luck?

TOM

Yes. Madame Cavallini has been good enough to — [*Briefly.*] We're engaged.

VAN TUYL

[*In an expressionless voice.*] Engaged — ?

TOM

[*Harshly.*] Yes — engaged — engaged to be married — this lady and myself. [*Pause.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Calmly.*] My dear boy, I congratulate you.

TOM

[*Choking.*] What — ?

VAN TUYL

I congratulate you. Madame Cavallini stands alone, as I have always said. And while I confess I am — a bit surprised, I am flattered — [*Turning to her with a bow.*] that she has chosen one of my friends and countrymen for this — great honor.

TOM

Then it's all right — ? You approve — you give us your consent?

VAN TUYL

[*Turning to him.*] Consent?

TOM

Yes — for the parish, I mean — represented by yourself as senior warden and chairman of the vestry.

VAN TUYL

Most certainly, my dear boy. You know you can always count on me to wish you every happiness.

TOM

[*Baffled.*] Why, you talk as if you *liked* it —

VAN TUYL

[*Not understanding.*] I don't quite —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] All I can say is, you must have changed your mind since Saturday.

VAN TUYL

Since Saturday?

TOM

Why, don't you remember warning me with tears in your eyes to keep away from this — this lady?

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] Ah, that was Saturday!

TOM

You said we were perfectly unfitted for life together— we were as far apart as the poles through birth and training and career —

VAN TUYL

[*Deprecating.*] Oh, don't bring up any foolish statements I —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] You even went so far as to — to mention certain — flaws in Madame Cavallini's character.

VAN TUYL

My dear Tom!

TOM

[*Going on.*] Her temper — selfishness — an absence of stability —

VAN TUYL

Really, my boy, you mustn't hold me to account for —

TOM

[*Interrupting.*] And now, sir, I — I want to ask you here, before us both, if you were absolutely frank on Saturday —

VAN TUYL

What's that?

TOM

[*His voice almost breaking.*] If there were any argument against my — my attachment which you did not see fit to offer at the time —

VAN TUYL

Why, Tom, I don't understand —

TOM

If there was, sir, tell it now — tell it for God's sake — or else forever after hold your peace! [*Pause.*]

VAN TUYL

I don't see why you're so excited, but if it gives you any satisfaction to know I said all I could on Saturday —

TOM

[*Quickly.*] You held nothing back?

VAN TUYL

Why, no, of course not! What's the matter, Tom?

[*Tom turns away in silent agony. Rita makes a sudden movement. Van Tuyl suppresses her with a glance. A moment's pause. Tom faces them again, controlling himself with difficulty.*]

TOM

Sit down, sir, please.

VAN TUYL

[*Doing so.*] Well?

TOM

[*With difficulty.*] I — I want to apologize beforehand for what I'm going to say. I know I'm acting outrageously — but — I can't help it! [*Van Tuyl makes a movement towards him.*] No, wait! You're my best friend, Mr. Van Tuyl — [*To Rita.*] and you're the woman I want to make my wife. So I — I'm sure you'll both of you be sympathetic and make — allowances for me.

VAN TUYL

[*Heartily.*] Of course, my boy, of course!

TOM

[*Still with difficulty.*] Madame Cavallini has been very frank and open with me, sir. She's just told me — about certain portions of her career — and of course, knowing as I do, how hard it is for girls when they're poor and young — and alone — why, I should be only too glad to tell her it's all right and blot it from my memory forever — but — but — [*He pauses, unable to go on, then rises, gripping the edge of the desk with both hands and leaning over it, haggard*

and terrible.] Before I can do that, there's one thing I've got to be sure of.

VAN TUYL

Yes, Tom?

TOM

It seems — you've been an — an admirer of hers for some time — [*As Van Tuyl glances at her involuntarily.*] *For God's sake, don't look at her now!* [*Controlling himself.*] And what I've got — to be sure of is that — there never has been anything — you know — between you two —

VAN TUYL

What — ?

TOM

[*Going on very quickly.*] I've asked her and she's denied it — and I believe her — implicitly, of course — but if — if *you'll* be good enough to deny it, too — oh, merely as a matter of form! — why, I — I shall be much obliged. Well?

VAN TUYL

[*After a slight pause.*] There's one thing I'm not going to deny, and that is my very deep and very true affection for Madame Cavallini. [*Looking at her.*] It is a sentiment none the less deep and true because it has lived for years with no response from her, and I am proud of my hope and my belief that it will continue so long as I'm alive to cherish it. [*Turning to Tom.*] As for the rest of your question, Tom, when you're yourself again you'll agree with me that it deserves no answer. I don't know how such thoughts have wormed their way into your mind, but one thing I *do* know, and that is the time will come when you would give your right hand never to have let them pass

your lips. Good-bye — [*To her.*] Good-bye, madame — I offer you the best of wishes — [*He is turning towards the door when Tom stops him.*]

TOM

[*Seizing his hand.*] No, wait — you shan't go until I've begged your pardon — I've been a fool, sir — a perfect fool, but if you can, I want you to forgive me!

VAN TUYL

Don't you think, my boy, you'd better ask Madame Cavallini's pardon first?

TOM

[*Turning to her.*] Rita, darling — I don't know just what to say — but I think if you forgive me again — I can promise I'll never — never — oh, you *do* forgive me, dear, don't you?

RITA

[*Suddenly pulling herself away.*] No — no — I cannot! It is too much —

TOM

What?

RITA

[*Straightening herself up and looking at him.*] I love you— I mus' spik de truth —-

VAN TUYL

Be quiet!

RITA

[*To Tom.*] It is all lies vhat ve 'ave said — all lies — *lies!*

TOM

[*Crying aloud.*] No — no —

RITA

I vas 'is mistress till de night I meet you!

TOM

Not Mr. Van Tuyl — not — [*He chokes.*]

VAN TUYL

Tom, listen to me for one minute —

TOM

[*Turning to him.*] Liar — thief —

VAN TUYL

For God's sake, Tom, don't —

TOM

[*With a cry.*] A-ah! [*He rushes at Van Tuyl to strike him down, but she stands before him.*]

RITA

[*Gasping.*] 'E lied for me — I tell you 'e lied for me — [*Pause. Tom stands fighting for his control. He regains it, exhausted, and turns to the desk.*]

TOM

[*In a whisper.*] Please go — both of you. [*He stoops to pick up the little Testament which has dropped to the floor, brushes it involuntarily, and puts it on desk.*]

VAN TUYL

Tom, I'd have given everything I have in the world to

have spared you this. I want you to remember that — if you can. [*Coming towards him.*] Tom, I —

TOM

Don't!

VAN TUYL

[*Half to himself.*] Very well. Good-bye. [*He goes out quickly. Tom sits down slowly in his desk-chair.*]

RITA

[*After trying once or twice to find her voice.*] Meestaire — Meestaire Tom —

[*He shudders at the sound. She goes to the mirror, takes off his mother's earrings and necklace, kisses locket, and lays them on mantelpiece. Then she puts on her coat, picks up her muff and monkey from chair where she left them earlier in the act.*]

RITA

[*Softly to the monkey.*] *Basta — basta — poverina mia!* [*She stands looking at Tom. He makes no sign. Then at last, very simply.*] T'ank you for 'aving loved me. [*She drops her veil and goes out. As he hears the door close, he has a few seconds of gasping for breath. Then, burying his face in his arms, he breaks into silent convulsive sobs. From far away comes the sound of the little hand-organ. It is still playing the old waltz.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ROMANCE

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE: *Mme. Cavallini's apartment at the Brevoort House, that night, after the performance. At the left are doors leading to the hall. At the right are two long windows, with a tall old-fashioned gilt mirror and low consol table between. At the back — towards right — is an arch leading to the bed-room, covered with drawn portieres. At left, a smaller door. Opposite the windows are the fireplace and mantel. A fire is burning. A grand piano is covered with a confusion of music, hats, clothes, etc. Towards the centre are a couch and a table. The couch is strewn with various clothes, wigs, costumes, etc. Between the two windows is a perch on which sit, side by side, two stately scarlet macaws. Near the fire is the monkey's cradle — a charming cloud of lace and pale blue satin. There are several open trunks lying about the room in various stages of completed packing. Clothes, of all descriptions, are strewn about in the greatest disorder everywhere. The whole effect of the room is luxurious, yet filled with confusion and a sense of Bohemian life.*

When the curtain goes up, it is night. The gas is lit. Before the fire squats Signora Vannucci — a fat, untidy old Italian woman with a moustache and long earrings, dressed very gaily, her skirts pinned up, a pair of old soiled pink satin slippers on her feet. She is telling her fortune with a pack of greasy cards, stopping every now and then to turn and stir two saucepans which are cooking over the fire.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*To herself.*] *O Dio mio! Non importa — riproviamo —!*

[*She gives the saucepan a stir, shuffles, and deals.*] *Picche! Il nove di fiori! Cosa ci hanno queste bestie di carte! — Ah! Il fante di cuori! Forse vuol dire un' amante — chi sà? Il dieci di quadri — ! A-ha-he! Posso ancora esser ricca —* [*She laughs to herself. There is a knock at the door.*] *Avanti!*

[*Adolph comes in. He is an old German waiter, carrying a tray with plates, napkins, glasses, bowl of salad, etc.*] You gotta da garlic — yes?

ADOLPH

[*Putting down tray.*] Two liddle beeces.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Cut dem ver' small an' put dem in vhen you maka da salad.

ADOLPH

Madame, she vill be hungry when she back comes from de opera.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

She eata nodings before she go — she dreenka a leetle vine an' coffee, dat is all. So I come back qveeck an' maka myself da macaroni wid da tomat' sauce — she alvays lika dat!

ADOLPH

Ach! no great artiste vill eat pefore she sing! Do I not know? Have I not de first tenor of de Royal Court Opera of de city of Steichenblätter been? Do I not remember how I feel vhen —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Gloomily interrupting him.*] You 'ave forgetta da cheese.

ADOLPH

[*Crushed.*] *Du lieber Gott!*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*With a retrospective smile.*] Ah, vhen I was *prima donna* at Bologna an' maka my *début* as *Linda di Chamonix* in da great, da bee-eautiful, da gala performance — an' 'is — 'ow you say — 'is *eccellenza* da duca di Modena, 'e stan' an' clappa de 'an's an' say so loud — "Bravo, Vannucci! Bravo! Bravissimo!" —

ADOLPH

[*Interrupting.*] Your sauce, it burn.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Rushing to fire.*] *Madonna santa proteggetec!* [*She stirs the sauce vigorously.*]

ADOLPH

[*Sadly as he mixes salad.*] Ach — so! De good old days — dey are all gone!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Stirring.*] Da opera now — vhat is eet? Vone beeg noise!

ADOLPH

Dis *Faust* an' *Mignon* —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Covering her ears.*] *Impossibili!*

ADOLPH

Schreklich — !

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Orribili!

ADOLPH

Ungeheuer — !

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Kissing her hand.*] *Ma La Favorita!*

ADOLPH

Der Freischutz!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Bellissima!

ADOLPH

Wünderschön!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Celestiale!

ADOLPH

Kolossal — !

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Sighing.*] But ah! who now gotta da voice to seeng dem!

ADOLPH

[*Scornfully.*] Mario — ? Bah!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Loftily.*] Grisi — ? Pouf!

ADOLPH

Giuglini — ? *Ein schwein — !*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

La Patti — ? *Un pulce — !*

ADOLPH

La Cavallini — ?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Ah, si — la Cavallini!

ADOLPH

[*Patronizingly.*] She 'ave a leedle somet'ing —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

You bet my life she 'ave! Ah! sometime vhen I stan' in de veengs an' 'old 'er shawl an' leesten — I t'ink it is myself again come back from long ago!

ADOLPH

Ach, Gott! I, too, haf treams! An' vhen I my half dollar pay an' de stairs up climb an' de orchestra begin — I shut my eye an' yet vonce more again I am in Steichenblätter —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Catching his enthusiasm.*] *Si — si!* Da box vhere seeta da duca di Modena —

ADOLPH

I see again the tears upon de ladies' cheeks —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Da "Bravos!" of da bee-eautiful young men —

ADOLPH

The opera — it is *Norma* — I am *Pollio* —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Clasping her hands.*] Ah *Norma — !*

ADOLPH

[*With the bottle of oil in one hand.*] De great duet — act dree — it come at last! [*He sings softly in German.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Rising from fire with spoon still in hand.*] *Più forte! Cosi! Ora! Crescendo!* [*They sing the duet together in the very old-fashioned operatic way, tremendously in earnest. At the closing high note they fling themselves violently in one another's arms. Just here a small bellboy in buttons, enters from right, whistling between his teeth. He carries a card-tray, and stops, amazed at the sight.*]

THE BELLBOY

Where's the madam?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Kneeling by the fire and stirring.*] She 'ave not yet return.

THE BELLBOY

[*Confidentially.*] Say, wotter ye t'ink she do if I asked her t' put her name in me autograph album?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Your — vhat?

THE BELLBOY

[*Proudly.*] Me autograph album! [*Taking it from breast.*] I got Sam McGuire, the famous murderer, an' Edwin Booth, the celebrated actor, not t' mention the lady author o' "Uncle Tom's Cabin" an' —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Impatiently.*] Go vay! Go vay! What for you come an' talk so much an' —

THE BELLBOY

Hold yer horses, old lady! 'Tain't no use gettin' mad! There's a gent downstairs a-callin' on the madam — see? [*He holds out the salver with card.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Irritably.*] Giva me da card — qveeck, leetle animal! Qveeck, I say!

THE BELLBOY

Quit callin' me names, ye big Eyetalian rag-bag, or I'll —

ADOLPH

[*Interrupting.*] Ssh! Keep still! I vip you good! [*The bellboy hands her salver.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Reading card.*] A-ah! It is milor! 'E 'ave come back! *Santi benedetti!* [*To the bellboy.*] Go — breenga 'im in! [*To Adolph.*] An' leesten, my frien', a bottle of champagne!

ADOLPH

[*With tray, at door.*] Champagne?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Joyously.*] You bet my life! Da besta you got!

[*Adolph goes out. She rises, puts card on piano, and begins unpinning her skirts, etc. The bellboy profits by this to steal*

some grapes and a cake from the table. She turns and sees him.]
Ah, demonietto! [*She rushes at him with hand upraised.*]

THE BELLBOY

Rag-bag! [*He escapes. She hastily attempts to tidy the room, closes a couple of trunks, etc. Then, singing an incredible cadenza, she puts on a scarf, sticks an ostrich feather in her hair and is admiring the result in the long mirror, when there is a knock at the door to the hall.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*With a long trill.*] *Avanti!* [*The door opens and Van Tuyl appears.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Entering.*] Well, signora! I haven't seen you for some time, have I? You're younger and more beautiful than ever!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Shaking hands.*] Ah, milor — you maka da joke as alvays! But I don' care — I am so full of joy because you 'ave come!

VAN TUYL

Thanks very much. [*Looking about.*] How's the menagerie? [*To the parrots.*] Remember me, old lady — eh?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Dey are full of love for milor — *ecco!* See! Manrico, 'e visha to keess 'is 'and!

VAN TUYL

Bite it, you mean. [*Going to fire.*] Where's Adelina — ? [*Seeing the cradle.*] Oh!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

She 'ave jus' eata vone greata beeg suppair.

VAN TUYL

[*Looking into cradle.*] Six olives — strawberry jam — a few hothouse grapes —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Rapturously.*] An' da cupa of chocolate! Ah, milor — 'e 'ave recolleck ev'ryt'ings!

VAN TUYL

[*Seeing the saucepans by the fire.*] What's that you're cooking — not your famous macaroni?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

It is for madame. She eata nodings alla da day. An' she looka so vhite an' seeck — *ah, Madonna!* I gotta vone great beeg fear!

VAN TUYL

How did she get through the performance?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Milor vas not dere — ?

VAN TUYL

No.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

'E 'ave not 'eard — ?

VAN TUYL

No.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Volubly.*] Ah, she maka — vhat you say? — *un triomfo*

enorme! It maka me t'ink of dat so splendid night I sing *Lucrezia Borgia* an' 'is Excellenza da duca di Modena, 'e —

VAN TUYL

[*Interrupting.*] Yes, I remember. [*Looking at his watch.*] Madame is late.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

She say *addio* to Signor Strakosch an' de oder artistes an' receive da present —

VAN TUYL

Really?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Nodding.*] Da pin vid da big rubee, an' de bracelet vid many pearl, an' ah! Madonna! — da di'mon' crown from alla da signora of New York! [*During the following she works at the packing and finally finishes and shuts one more of the trunks.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Not paying much attention.*] It's true — the city's gone quite mad.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Dio mio! Vhen I recolleck dat tomorrow ve go so far avay from dis country an' milor an' all da mon' — it maka my 'eart feel jus' like 'e vill break!

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] Poor little heart!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

An' vhen do ve see milor again?

VAN TUYL

Soon, I hope. But in the interval, signora, I want you to enjoy yourself, so — [*Putting his hand in his pocket and taking out his wallet.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Sidling up to him.*] Oh, milor — !

VAN TUYL

[*Selecting a bill.*] So here's a little something just to remind you that —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Interrupting.*] Oh, no, milor — you already giva me so much — no — no — it is imposs' — [*She holds out her hand greedily.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Putting bill in hand.*] Nonsense! As friend to friend! There! You can change it when you get to Naples.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Enthusiastically, as she puts bill in stocking.*] Ah, milor— 'e is so good! Jus' like 'is Excéllenza da duca di Modena —

VAN TUYL

[*Interrupting.*] I believe you. [*Suddenly.*] Wait! What's that?

[*There is an instant's pause. From far away come the distant strains of "Yankee Doodle," played on a brass band. During the following scene the music grows nearer, and beneath it can be heard the vague, confused noise of many people shouting.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*After listening a moment.*] Da music — [*She goes quickly to window, opens it, steps out on balcony and looks up street.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Following her.*] A brass band! [*He stands by window.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*As the music grows louder.*] *Santi buonissimi!* What is dat dey play?

VAN TUYL

[*Opening the window wide and joining her on the balcony.*] "Yankee Doodle!"

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Suddenly.*] Ah! Dey come! Dey come!

VAN TUYL

[*As the sound increases.*] Where? [*He leans out, too.*] Fourteenth Street! That's *en route* from the Academy —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Who grows more and more excited as the scene proceeds.*] *Ecco!* See — !

VAN TUYL

Torches — ! By Jove, it's a regular Republican rally!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

More peoples — an' more — an' more an' more dey come!

VAN TUYL

Every fellow with his hat off — [*Shivering.*] and zero weather, too!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Pointing.*] See — de peoples in de vindows! Dat so fat man — vhat is dat 'e say?

VAN TUYL

[*Raising his voice above the uproar.*] I can't hear!
[*The music stops.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*At a loud roar of "Bravo!" "Cavallini!" "Hurrah!" etc.*] Ah! She come — she come! [*She claps her hands and leans far out.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Leaning out, too.*] Where?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Pointing.*] Dere — do you not see da carriage?

VAN TUYL

But where's the coachman — where are the horses — ? Good Lord! if those young fools aren't dragging it themselves!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Ah! vhen I was prima donna at Bologna an' singa *Lucrezia Borgia* for —

VAN TUYL

[*Interrupting and chuckling to himself.*] In evening dress — without any overcoats! By Jove, what a lark!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Suddenly.*] *Ah! Eccola là! Bellaza mia! Come è bella!* You see 'er — yes?

VAN TUYL

No — that tall young devil's in the way! [*Suddenly.*] Ah, *there* she is! [*To himself.*] By Jove! By — *Jove!* [*He stares spell-bound. The band, now much nearer, slowly begins "Way Down Upon the Swaunee Ribber."*

The torchlight illumines the two figures on the balcony. The procession now is almost underneath them. The music stops. There is a burst of cheering. Signora Vannucci waves her handkerchief wildly.]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Evivva! Evivva! Brava Cavallini! Brava regina! Ecco mi alla finestra! Guarda alla tua povera vecchia Vannucci — [*In delight.*] *Ah! Ecco! Cosi va bene!* [*She laughs and waves. To Van Tuyl.*] She look up — she see us!

[*Van Tuyl takes off his hat and bows in a very stately way. Suddenly the glitter of a rocket is seen in the street outside.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Ehi! Ehi! Cosa fate? [*Another rocket goes off and the red glow of Bengal light is seen from the street below, lasting for a monent and then dying away.*] *Ah! Maledetti!* [*She clutches Van Tuyl and crosses herself.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Reassuringly.*] It's all right — those fellows in the corner are setting off some fireworks, that's all. [*There is a great cheer from the crowd.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

She come — she descend from da carriage — Look! look 'ow da young men kissa 'er 'and! [*There are more rockets and the band begins to play "Kennst Du Das Land." From*

below is heard a volley of shouts and cheers and laughter.] Dere! Up-a da step! So —! At las' she is inside — [*Coming back quickly into the room.*] Qveeck! Shuta da vindow — dis room is all dam' col' — [*He steps inside and closes the window. The fireworks are still seen, but the music and crowd are heard more faintly. Signora Vannucci bustles about, putting a new log on the fire, adjusting furniture, etc.*] So! Dere! *Ecco!* Dat is right! Vill milor 'elp me vid dis chair — ? an' da table — more near da fire — Lika dat! [*Suddenly.*] *Madonna mia!* I 'ave forget — [*She quickly pulls back the portières over arch at back, revealing the bedroom. There is a canopied bed, turned down, with elaborate pillows, etc. A small lamp burns on its head, casting a warm glow. On the bed is a nightgown case, heavily embroidered. A luxurious negligée of fur and velvet lies across a near-by chair, with a pair of slippers beneath. Signora Vannucci picks them up and comes back immediately into the sitting-room. She hangs the robe on a chair close to fire and puts the slippers where they, too, will warm.*] Milor, 'e recolleck dis robe — ?

VAN TUYL

[*Helping her arrange it.*] Millefleurs!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Laughing.*] Ah, vhat good time milor 'e giva us dere! I vish dat —

[*There is a knock at the door and before anyone can answer, it is opened, and Adolph appears hurriedly, carrying a champagne bucket.*]

ADOLPH

[*Excitedly.*] You haf hear — ? You haf seen? Look dere! [*He points to fireworks outside.*] *Mein Got im Himmel!*

[*He puts down the champagne by the table. The bellboy bursts in excitedly.*]

THE BELLBOY

[*With a long whistle.*] Whew — ! Holy cats! This town ain't seen the like since the Prince o' Wales was here! [*There is an especially brilliant effect of fireworks outside.*] Jee-rusalem — ! [*He rushes to the window. The Head Waiter, two subordinates and two hall boys in uniform come in, one after the other, talking among themselves and laden with "floral offerings" of all kinds. There are wreaths, "set-pieces" in the form of harps, hearts, etc. One large bird with "Nightingale" worked in white roses upon red, etc. Some have the American and Italian colors attached, others have sentiments such as "Say Not Good-bye," "Our Mignon," "Addio," etc.*]

ONE WAITER

Ouvrez la porte!

ANOTHER WAITER

Oui — ne voyez-vous pas que je suis occupé — ?

HEAD WAITER

Où faut-il poser ces engins-ci, madame?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Sur le piano — bien! c'est ça! Dis-donc — et ce que tu as sur la table — [*To Van Tuyl.*] Are dey not bee-eautiful? *Santi benissimi!* [*To the waiters.*] *Va doucement, idiot — ! Tu vas l'abîmer — ! Penchez celle-la à côté de la chaise —*

HEAD WAITER

Vite! Vite! Espèce d'un escargot — ! Madame va venir — toute de suite! Ah, la voilà — ! Comme elle est ravissante —!

M. Baptiste

[*Outside.*] *Ah, madame, nous sommes infiniment heureux de prendre part dans le triomphe d'une artiste si célèbre* — [*As he has spoken, he has entered and stands respectfully on one side of the door, bowing and rubbing his hands. He is the hotel proprietor and wears a frock-coat.*]

Rita

[*Entering.*] *Merci, monsieur — merci mille fois — vous êtes trop aimable* — [*To Signora Vannucci in a whisper.*] *Per l'amor di Dio, mettili fuori! Non posso più* — [*She is in gorgeous evening dress, glittering with jewels. On her head is a crown of diamonds. Her cloak is purple. In one hand she carries a wreath of laurel, tied with a golden ribbon. With the other she holds a great armful of white roses. She is very pale and exquisitely gracious. The music comes to an end just after her entrance. There is a renewed burst of cheering outside.*] *Ils sont toujours là? Ecoutez — qu'est-ce qu'ils disent?*

M. Baptiste

C'est très confus, madame — [*To the bellboy.*] Eh, you! Dose peoples out dere, vhat is it dey say?

The Bellboy

[*Shrilly.*] They're yellin' fer a speech!

[*There are indeed heard loud cries of "Speech!" "Just a little one!" "Come on!" etc.*]

M. Baptiste

[*To Rita.*] *Si madame était assez aimable de leur addresser* —

Rita

[*Drawing back.*] *Ah, non — non — c'est impossible* —

M. Baptiste

Trois paroles, vous savez —

Rita

Vraiment, monsieur — je suis si fatiguée —

The Bellboy

[*Yelling inside.*] They won't go way!

M. Baptiste

Je vous prie, madame — pour l'honneur de l'hôtel —

Rita

[*In a flash of petulance.*] *Non. Je réfuse — entendez vous? Jé réfuse absolument!* [*Turning away.*] *Ah, par example — c'est trop fort!*

Signora Vannucci

[*Coaxingly.*] *Ti prego, cara.*

Rita

[*Stamping her foot.*] *Dio bono! Per che cosa mi prendete?* [*There is a renewed outburst from the crowd.*]

Van Tuyl

[*Speaking for the first time.*] Madame, your public's calling you.

Rita

Vhat — ?

Van Tuyl

[*Simply.*] You must obey. [*Pause.*]

Rita

[*In a low tone.*] Open de vindow.

[*The bellboy does so, the noise is heard very much more clearly. She lays down her wreath, then goes slowly to the window.*]

M. Baptiste

Ah, que madame est bonne —

[*Rita steps out on balcony. There is a great cheer as she appears, the red Bengal light, blazing up again, falls fitfully upon her figure. There is the hiss and glare of many rockets set off simultaneously. The band plays a fanfare — the general effect is a blare of light, noise and splendor. She stands in the midst of it all, — bowing, smiling and holding up her hand for silence. In the room behind her everyone is applauding. Baptiste utters an occasional "Bravo!" and Signora Vannucci ostentatiously wipes away her tears. Then quite suddenly there is a silence. A man's voice is heard yelling "If you don't feel like talkin' — sing!" There is a burst of laughter, cries of "Shut up!" "Give her a chance!" etc., and silence again falls. A little pause.*]

Rita

[*Simply and tenderly.*] Sveet ladies — gentlemen — dear peoples who 'ave been so good to me! I do not know your names an' faces — I cannot follow you into your 'omes, an' laugh an' veep vit' you in every joy an' sorrow. I can jus' sing a leetle, an' pray de saints dat somet'ing in my song vill spik to you an' say — [*Holding out her arms to them.*] "I love you! You are all I 'ave to love in dis beeg vorld!" [*There are cheers from below, cries of "That's the ticket!" "Hear that?" "Shut up!" "Let her go on!" etc.*] Mebbe you don' on'erstan' jus' vhat dat mean — you who 'ave 'usban's, vives an' leetle children, too! [*With a smile.*] Ah, vell! I vould not like it dat you should! I only tell you so you feel like doing for me vone las' great kin'ness —

[*There are cries of "What is it?" "Tell us!" "Give us a chance!" etc., from below. She takes a step forward and speaks very earnestly.*] Tomorrow I go far avay. Mebbe sometime I sing for you again — [*Cheers and cries of "Of course!" "That's right!" "Come back soon!" etc. She puts up her hand for silence.*] — an' mebbe not. Who knows? But if t'rough all your 'appy, 'appy lives you carry, vay down deep, vone leetle t'ought of me — vone golden memory of my song — vherever I am, dear frien's, oh! I vill know it an' be glad! [*Shouts of "We will!" "That's easy!" "Couldn't help it!" "Trust us!" etc. Her tone changes. She continues with tender playfulness.*] In my country ve 'ave a leetle — vhat you say? — t'ing ve tell each oder vhen ve say "Addio" — "*Che le rose fioriscano nei vostri cuori fin ch'io ritorno a coglierle!*" May de roses blossom in your 'eart until I come to gadder dem again!

[*There is a great shout from the adoring crowd. "Good-bye!" "Good luck!" "Come back soon!" "We'll wait for you!" etc., etc., are heard. The band begins to play, very slowly, "Auld Lang Syne." The cheering continues. There is a final burst of fireworks. Rita tosses one of her white roses over the balcony, there is a renewed shout, she smiles and follows it with another and another, until they all are gone. Then, still smiling and showing her empty hands, she blows a last kiss and steps inside, shutting the window behind her. There has been applause from the people in the room at the close of her little speech, and now there is a general movement forward to congratulate her.*]

M. Baptiste

[*Effusively.*] *Ah, madame, mes compliments! C'était parfait!*

Rita

Merci — merci —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Embracing her.*] *Amore mio — ! Come sei bella!*

RITA

Ah, non era niente —

VAN TUYL

[*Formally.*] Madame, my congratulations!

RITA

T'ank you ver' much — I — [*She staggers suddenly, leaning on a chair and putting her hand to her head. There is a moment's pause, then everyone speaks at once.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Rushing to her.*] *Tesoro mio — ! Cos'e' — ?*

M. BAPTISTE

Mais elle est malade —

VAN TUYL

[*To Adolph.*] A glass of water — quick! [*He brings it hurriedly.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*To Rita.*] *Bevi.*

RITA

[*Recovering and refusing the glass.*] *No — sto benone —* [*To Baptiste.*] *J'ai la tête en feu — mille pardons —* [*She smiles.*]

M. BAPTISTE

[*Sympathetically.*] *Ah oui, madame — je comprends — des fois, vous savez, ça arrive —*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*To Van Tuyl.*] She 'ave eat nodings for vone — two day! [*To Baptiste.*] *Monsieur, vous savez madame — elle est au bout de ses forces — alors, vous comprenez —*

M. BAPTISTE

Mais certainement — [*To the waiters, chasseurs, bellboys, etc.*] *Assez — assez, mes enfants! Dites bon soir à madame et sauvez-vous — !* [*They all huddle towards the door.*]

THE BELLBOY

[*To Adolph who is trying to pull him along.*] Leggo o' me! Don't ye see this is my only chance? [*He struggles.*]

ADOLPH

[*Under his breath.*] Ssh! Be still!

A WAITER

[*Officiously.*] *Tais-toi!*

THE HEAD WAITER

[*Angrily.*] *Nom d'un pipe — ! Enlevez cet enfant-là — !*

THE BELLBOY

[*Loudly, as they all try to pull him.*] I will not! [*Calling to Rita.*] Say!

RITA

You vant to spik to me — yes? Come, I vill leesten! [*The waiters release him.*]

THE BELLBOY

[*Triumphantly to them.*] Ya — ya! Did ye ever get left? [*He turns to Rita and suddenly becomes horribly embarrassed.*]

RITA

[*Smiling.*] Vell?

THE BELLBOY

[*All in one breath, speaking very rapidly.*] Beggin' yer pardon an' thankin' ye for all favors past an' present would it cause ye too much inconvenience t' affix yer autograph to this little album thus joinin' the large company o' famous ladies an' gents what have spread sunshine in the life of a po'r bellboy!

RITA

[*Bewildered.*] What — ? [*To Baptiste.*] *Que dit-il, le p'tit?*

M. BAPTISTE

[*Smoothly.*] *Oh, c'est votre autographe, madame* — [*Under his breath as he glances ferociously at the boy.*] *Sacré p'tit cochon* —

RITA

Mais certainement — [*To the bellboy holding out her hand for book.*] 'Ere — vhere shall I — ?

THE BELLBOY

[*Gratefully giving her the book and a pencil.*] Say, yer a real Jim Dandy! [*Pointing to the page.*] Right there — between P. T. Barnum an' General Grant! [*As she writes.*] I've been savin' that space for two years, but holy Moses! I guess I'll never get anybody t' beat *you!*

RITA

[*Returning him book.*] So — ! Be good boy — vork 'ard — an' grow up fine, big Amer'can man! Vait! [*Picking up a wreath of roses and smilingly putting it round his neck.*] A souvenir!

THE BELLBOY

T'anks. But if yer givin' away souvenirs, there's one I'd like more'n this!

RITA

[*Innocently.*] An' vhat is dat?

THE BELLBOY

[*Taking his courage in both hands.*] Would ye — would ye give me a kiss? [*A movement of horror on the part of the waiters, proprietors, etc.*]

RITA

[*Smiling as she makes believe to box his ears, then bending over and kissing him.*] *Barabbin* — ! [*Pushing him towards door.*] Now run — qveeck — qveeck — !

THE BELLBOY

[*As he dashes out.*] S'elp me Gawd, I'll never wash that side o' my face again!

RITA

[*To all the waiters, etc., as they go out.*] *Bon soir! Bon soir! Merci bien — bon soir, Adolph —*

THE WAITERS

Bon soir, Madame — bon soir — [*They go out.*]

M. BAPTISTE

[*Kissing her hand.*] *A demain, madame — ! Et dormez bien!*

RITA

Merci — merci, cher m'sieur —

HEAD WAITER

[*Kissing her hand.*] *Ah, madame, vous savez nous serons désolés de vous perdre — !*

RITA

[*Murmuring politely.*] *Ah, m'sieur — c'est très aimable de votre part! Bon soir — bon soir!* [*They go out. Rita, Signora Vannucci and Van Tuyl are left alone.*]

RITA

[*Turning away with a sigh of lassitude.*] *Oh — ! Oh — ! Oh — ! Son cosi stanca —*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Sympathetically.*] *Poverina!*

RITA

[*To the parrots.*] *Bèh, Manrico, come stai stassera — eh? E tu, Leonora bella —* [*Giving them a lump of sugar from the table.*] *Ecco — ! Per celebrare!* [*She turns away, takes a cigarette from a box on a small table and lights it. Van Tuyl, leaning against the piano, smokes a cigarette quietly and watches her. Signora Vannucci bustles about the fire, preparing the negligée, slippers, etc.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Always speaking as one would to a spoilt, tired child.*] *Vieni, piccina! Levati il mantello! Guarda! Ecco la tua veste da camera tutta bella calda —*

RITA

[*Blowing out her match and turning vacantly.*] Eh — ? [*Understanding.*] *Ah, già — il mio mantello —* [*She drops*

her cloak carelessly on the floor as she comes over to the fire and stops by the monkey's cradle. She draws over it a small monogrammed blanket, which hangs over the foot, and carefully tucks it in.]

RITA

[*Smoking and gently rocking the cradle.*] *Va bene — dormi — dormi, belleza mia! Mamma è qui, vicino a te — dormi, anima mia — dormi — dormi —*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Coming to her with a large jewel-case.*] *La tua corona, cara — e i tuoi gioielli —*

RITA

[*Putting her hand to her brow.*] Oh, my 'ead — it is so tired — *Eccola* — ! [*She slowly and listlessly takes off the crown, her necklace, bracelets, brooches, rings, etc., and gives them to the Vannucci. The latter puts them in the jewel-case.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*While this is going on.*] *E la collana — cosi si fà — ora gli anelli — ora dammi il tuo braccio che ti levo i braccialetti—*

RITA

[*Petulantly, as Signora Vannucci pinches her in unclasping a bracelet.*] *Fà attenzione — che mi fai male!*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Quickly.*] *Oh, scusa — scusa, cara!* [*She shuts the case and puts it in the inside room.*]

RITA

[*Sitting down on the floor before the fire where the cards are*

scattered and speaking in an odd voice.] *Per l'ultima volta — chissà cosa diranno?* [*She recovers herself with an effort, gathers up the cards, shuffles, and begins to deal, her cigarette still in her mouth.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Coming from the inner room.*] *Ah, lascia le carte stassera!*

RITA

[*Paying no attention to her.*] *La carta di mezzo a destra — così!* [*Counting.*] *Una — due — tre — dieci! Così!* [*She deals and moves about the cards in a mystic pattern.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Kneeling by her and taking off her slippers, trying not to disturb her.*] *Eccoci!* [*Feeling her feet.*] *Madonna mia! Come son freddi — !*

RITA

[*Busy with the cards.*] *Il rè di cuori cambia posto col fante —* [*She kicks viciously at the Vannucci. Then resuming.*] *E il fante coll'asso —*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Gingerly trying to put a slipper on the other foot.*] *Adagio! Adagio!* [*As she succeeds.*] *Ecco! E già finita!* [*Undoing Rita's dress.*] *Adesso leviamo questo — ci vuole un momento solo —*

RITA

[*Over her shoulder.*] *Via!* [*Resuming.*] *Metto l'ultimo quadro su il primo cuore —*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*As before.*] *Ti prego, cara — unmomentino —*

RITA

[*In sudden anger.*] *Lasciami stare — ! O ti do una lavata di capo —*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Appealing to Van Tuyl.*] Milor — 'e see — she villa not let me — [*Rita solemnly crosses herself thrice.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Tossing away his cigarette and rising.*] Rita.

RITA

[*Looking up.*] What — ?

VAN TUYL

[*Quietly.*] Stand up. The signora wants to put on your dressing-gown.

RITA

[*Whimpering as she tosses her cigarette into the fire and rises.*] Oh, dear! What for you make me —

VAN TUYL

[*Interrupting.*] Ssh — ! [*During the following, with the Vannucci's help she slips off her ball-gown and puts on the elaborate negligée.*]

RITA

[*Simply, still looking at him.*] Why you come 'ere?

VAN TUYL

Don't you want to see me?

RITA

Oh, I dunno — I am so tired —

VAN TUYL

[*Taking one of her hands.*] Poor little thing!

RITA

Yes, dat is right — poor leetle — [*Suddenly and viciously to Vannucci.*] *Per carità! Credi che sia fatta di legno — ?*

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Panic-stricken.*] *Scusi tanto, cara mia! Va bene, — cosi!* [*She goes off into the inner room, carrying the dress.*]

RITA

[*In a sulky voice to Van Tuyl.*] She mos' ver' nearly break my arm! [*She drops on the floor again and lies at full length, her chin in her hands, studying the cards.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] And what do the cards say — eh, little Italian sorceress?

RITA

Dey say — dey say — [*She looks far away.*] You did not see 'im veep!

VAN TUYL

What?

RITA

[*As before.*] 'E veep jus' like a leetle boy — vhen first 'e meet de badness of de vorld —

VAN TUYL

[*Concerned.*] Ah, don't, my dear! Don't think of it any more!

RITA

[*Looking down again at the cards.*] T'ree club — dat mean a long, long journey —

VAN TUYL

[*Cheerfully.*] Well! You're certainly going away. What comes next?

RITA

Vour — five di'mon' — an' good vones, too. Dat mean success an' money — vhat you say? — great fame. Only to reach it I mus' go t'rough much.

VAN TUYL

You'll get there — never fear!

RITA

[*Closing her eyes.*] Ah, my frien', I t'ink I am too tired to try.

VAN TUYL

[*Sympathetically.*] I know it's hard, my dear, but —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] 'E vould not spik to me vone leetle vord! I say "T'ank you for 'aving loved me!" — jus' like dat! — an' den I vait. But 'e say nodings — so I go avay.

VAN TUYL

[*Pained.*] Don't, dear, it's no use! [*Pointing to a card.*] What's that jack of hearts doing up here in the corner?

RITA

Mebbe 'e is a blond young man who give to me 'is

'eart — [*Breaking off.*] 'Ow long you t'ink, before 'e vill forget?

VAN TUYL

Ssh!

RITA

[*Returning to cards.*] *Ah, che m'importa?* [*Pointing to the jack.*] Dat blond young man — look! 'Ow 'e is far from me!

VAN TUYL

[*Looking at cards.*] From you — ? Oh, of course! You're the red queen down in the middle of all those spades. They're nothing bad, I hope?

RITA

You are among dem.

VAN TUYL

I — ?

RITA

Yes, an' de oders, too — see! You are all about me — dere is no vay out.

VAN TUYL

But, dear, I —

RITA

[*Beginning with a little smile.*] My — vhat you say? [*Tenderly.*] — my flames — my splendid vones of whom I vas so proud — look! 'ow you are black, an' strong — *ah, santa Madonna!* I 'ave give you ev'ryt'ings, an' now vhen love, 'e come an' smile an' 'old out 'is dear 'ands, I cannot give — no, cruel vones! You 'ave leave me noddings — you 'ave take it all — [*She sweeps away the cards and buries her face in her hands.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Gently.*] No. Not all. No one could do that. [*Changing his tone.*] Come and play for me! Please, there's a dear!

RITA

[*Vacantly.*] Play — ?

VAN TUYL

[*Standing above her.*] Yes. A little music will do you good.

RITA

Music — ?

VAN TUYL

[*Simply.*] That's left, my dear. [*Pause.*]

RITA

[*Half to herself.*] Yes — dat is lef'. [*To him.*] Vell, vhat you vant I play? [*She holds out her hands for him to help her up.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Doing so.*] Try something of our old friend Abbé Liszt. You know, that thing I used to like so much — all stars and jasmine — voices in the night — [*She sits at the piano and plays.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Delighted.*] That's it! [*He hums the air lightly.*] By Jove — ! Isn't that beautiful? What's it called?

RITA

[*Playing.*] A dream of love —

VAN TUYL

Of course! So it is! [*She breaks off.*] What's the matter?

RITA

I 'ave vake up — dat is all. De dream is gone — [*She buries her face in her hands. Van Tuyl puts his hand gently on her shoulder. There is an instant's pause. Signora Vannucci comes bustling in from the other room.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Entering.*] *Adesso! Siamo bell'e pronti per* — [*She sees Rita's position. Van Tuyl makes a gesture for her to be still. She stops in the middle of her phrase. Then, under her breath.*] *Poverina!* [*She catches Van Tuyl's eye, makes a gesture towards Rita, then to macaroni at fire, next to table — then pantomime of eating. He nods assent. With every evidence of satisfaction she goes over to fire and takes up the macaroni, pours the sauce over it, and stirs it.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Turning to Rita, speaking kindly and cheerfully.*] Supper's ready!

RITA

[*Stifled.*] I am not 'ungry.

VAN TUYL

[*Pleading.*] Oh, please! Why, the signora has taken all the trouble to cook your favorite macaroni —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*From fire.*] *Al sugo — sono buonissimi!*

RITA

No — no — no —

VAN TUYL

Think how disappointed she'll be — [*Raising her.*] There! Come along, little girl — [*Showing her the table.*] Doesn't that salad look good? We'll sit you down in this big armchair at the head of the table — [*Doing so as he speaks.*] and I'll be butler, with my napkin over my arm — so! [*Imitating a servant's manner.*] And will madame drink Chianti or a little champagne — ? [*Looking at the label on the bottle.*] *Roznay et Perrault, '52* — not too dry, I venture to recommend it. Champagne — ? Very good, madame — I'll open it at once! [*He begins to do so.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Serving her with spaghetti.*] *Ecco! Che buon odore?* [*Sprinkling it with cheese.*] *Mettiamo abbastanza formaggio* —

VAN TUYL

[*Pulling the cork and filling a glass.*] There! That's a happy sight for any prima donna! Just taste it now and tell me if it's all right. If not, I'll send down and — [*As she refuses the glass.*] Please, dear! You really need it!

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*As one speaks to a child.*] *Macchè! Non mangi?* [*Coaxingly.*] *Ti prego — !*

VAN TUYL

[*Offering her again the glass.*] Just as a favor — please. [*She shakes her head.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Winding a great coil of spaghetti around the end of a fork and holding it in front of Rita's mouth.*] *Questo pochino* —

presto! presto! Apri la bocca! [*As Rita draws her head away and the spaghetti falls to the plate.*] *Santo Dio!* [*A pause of discouragement. She and Van Tuyl look at each other and shrug their shoulders. Then a happy idea comes to the signora. Behind Rita's back, she gestures towards Van Tuyl, then to the spaghetti, pantomime of his sitting at table opposite Rita, and eating and drinking. He smiles and nods.*]

VAN TUYL

[*To Rita.*] You know the sight of that macaroni's making *me* hungry? I wonder if there'd be enough to give me just a —

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Interrupting and running to serve him.*] But certainly! Now if milor 'e jus' sita downa — [*As Van Tuyl does so, opposite Rita.*] Ah, dat is all right! *You* lika da macaroni, I bet my life! [*She serves him.*]

VAN TUYL

Here! That's enough! Thanks. [*As he pours himself a glass of wine.*] And just a swallow of champagne — I declare, I feel quite famished! [*Pause. He does not touch anything.*] Well? Are you going to let me starve?

RITA

[*Rousing herself.*] What you say?

VAN TUYL

You know I can't eat anything until my hostess does.

RITA

[*Aggrieved.*] It is a treeck you play!

VAN TUYL

[*Humbly.*] No, on my word, I'm hungry!

RITA

[*Smiling unwillingly.*] Den jus' because I am so frightfully polite! [*She eats a piece of spaghetti. Signora Vannucci and Van Tuyl exchange glances.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Hanging over Rita.*] *Buoni?*

RITA

[*Patting her cheek.*] *Squisiti* — !

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Kissing her.*] *Tesorino mio!*

VAN TUYL

I'm thirsty, too!

RITA

[*Smiling.*] *Blageur!* [*She drinks some champagne. He smiles and follows her example.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Putting down his glass.*] A thousand thanks! And now, my dear, the signora's had a hard day's packing and tomorrow she'll be up at dawn. Why don't you send her to bed and give her a good night's rest?

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

Grazia, milor — I am nota much tired —

RITA

Ha ragione. A letto! E metti in gabbia i pappagalli! [*She drinks again.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Meaningly.*] *Capisco! Tu e milor avrete da chiacchierare un po'!* [*To the parrot.*] *E voi, povere bestie! Dovete avere un bel sonno.* [*Unchaining them and taking one on each wrist.*] *Andiamo — !* [*To Van Tuyl.*] I 'ope milor 'e sleep ver' fine! Good night!

VAN TUYL

[*Politely rising.*] Oh, thanks. Good night, signora.

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*At door — back.*] *E tu, anima mia — mangia più che puoi!*

RITA

Buona notte — [*Suddenly putting down her glass, rising and running to Signora Vannucci.*] *Carissima mia, ti ringrazio tanto — tanto! Ti amo sempre — non dimenticare! Ti amo — Ti amo —* [*She throws her arms around her neck and kisses her warmly.*]

SIGNORA VANNUCCI

[*Half smothered by the embrace.*] *Madonna santissima, cosa vuol dire tutto questo?* [*Snivelling a little.*] *Corpo di Bacco! Mi fai piangere! Buona notte —* [*Kissing her.*] *Buona notte, milor — !* [*Kissing her again.*] *Carissima — ! Buona notte — buona notte —* [*She goes out, sniffing and smiling and carrying the parrots.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Who has served her with salad.*] Now sit down and finish your supper.

RITA

[*Shaking her head.*] No — it is enough —

VAN TUYL

[*Filling her glass and lifting his own.*] Well, then, let's drink a toast — eh? I have it! To the splendor of your days to come! [*He bows and drinks. Then, seeing she has not followed his example.*] What's the matter? Don't they tempt you?

RITA

[*Holding her glass.*] *I* do not drink to vhat I know mus' be, but to a dream I vill not dream again — de picture of a small room, varm an' bright, vit' *'im* so busy writing at 'is desk, — an' me, before de fire, jus' rocking, smiling, vit' a little baby nursing at my breas'.

VAN TUYL

[*Suddenly.*] My dear, I want you to listen to a plan. [*Sitting in the big chair and drawing her down until she nestles at his feet.*] There — ! That's right — ! [*Cheerfully resuming.*] Now how would you like it if I sailed on the *Alaska* in April and met you in Paris and took you straight back to Millefleurs —

RITA

But my Russian concert tour?

VAN TUYL

They can get Patti in your place.

RITA

[*Not pleased.*] Patti — ?

VAN TUYL

Yes, she'd be glad enough to go.

RITA

[*Less and less enthusiastic.*] But my dear frien', it is not — vhat you say? — it is not fair?

VAN TUYL

To whom?

RITA

To dose poor Russians!

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] You're jealous!

RITA

[*Outraged.*] Of Patti? *Me — ?* [*Very scornfully.*] My Lord!

VAN TUYL

[*Caressing her hair.*] Then why bother? Think of Millefleurs and how we loved it on those nights in May! And it's there now — asleep and empty, like some spell-bound garden, just waiting for the touch of spring, and us, to give it life again.

RITA

[*Her head against his knee.*] You tol' me vonce you are too ol' to love Millefleurs —

VAN TUYL

[*Smiling.*] My dear, your sorcery can make me young again.

RITA

No — no — dat is imposs'ble — you don' on'erstan' —

VAN TUYL

[*Holding her.*] What is it? Tell me!

RITA

[*Rising.*] I cannot do t'ings like dat any more. [*A pause.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Humbly.*] Forgive me. It was a mistake. I didn't mean to hurt you.

RITA

[*Choking.*] 'Urt me? You — ? My dear, dear frien', I am not vort' such kin'ness — [*She takes his hand.*] But in dese las' few veeks, I learn somet'ing all new an' bee-eautiful — de goodness of de vorld — ! It come like some great light dat burn an' blind an' strike me to de groun'! It show me for de first time to myself! *Ah, santo Dio!* vhat it is I see! But now I cannot change, an' yet I cannot jus' forget, an' go on as before — you see, I am — oh, vhat you call it? all meex up! [*Pointing to her bed.*] I almos' vish dat I could lie down dere tonight — an' say good-bye.

VAN TUYL

And what about Tom?

RITA

[*Quickly.*] Don' spik 'is name —

VAN TUYL

I must. If knowing him has done all that for you — and God help me, dear, but up to now I didn't realize that it had! — don't you think you owe him something in return?

RITA

Somet'ing?

VAN TUYL

Yes, and I'll tell you what it is. You've got to pull yourself together, to raise your head and say, "I've been foolish in my time — but that's all over. From now on I'm going to be strong. I'm going to turn the rest of my life into a splendid noble thing. I won't stop till I'm the sort of woman Tom would be proud of" —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Please — please —

VAN TUYL

[*With sudden tenderness.*] I know it's hard, my darling, but that's no reason why you should give up. Why, it's your prize, your chance — the power to turn this dreadful business into something radiant and true — the final gift Tom's put into your hands!

RITA

[*Clasping her hands.*] *Ah, Dio mio* —

VAN TUYL

[*Going on.*] Be brave! live gloriously! And if responsibility's the price of love, love's worth it. Isn't it, my dear? [*A pause.*]

RITA

You are right. But oh, my frien' — my frien' — vhat 'ave I done — *vhat 'ave I done dat all dis come to me — ?* [*She bursts into agonized tears and throws herself on the couch, sobbing bitterly.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Putting his hand on her shaking shoulder.*] My dear, I'm proud of you.

[*There is a knock at the door to the hall. They both turn. A moment's silence. The knock is repeated.*]

RITA

[*Whispering.*] What shall I — ?

VAN TUYL

Go and open it.

RITA

[*Going to door.*] Who is dere?

THE BELLBOY'S VOICE

[*Outside.*] It's me, ma'am. There's a gent downstairs t' see ye.

RITA

What — ? [*She opens the door a crack.*]

THE BELLBOY

They told him it was awful late an' you was tired, but he wouldn't go an' made 'em send up this. [*He sticks in his arm with a tray, on which is a note. Rita takes it, looks at it, then opens it quickly and takes out a card, which she reads.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Watching her face.*] It's Tom?

RITA

[*Nodding.*] Yes —

VAN TUYL

[*In a low voice.*] What does he want?

RITA

[*Reading.*] "I mus' see you. It is life or death." [*Looking up.*] Dat's all.

VAN TUYL

What are you going to do?

RITA

I will say "no." [*She turns towards the door.*]

VAN TUYL

Wait!

RITA

[*Shuddering.*] After vhat 'as 'appen, I can never look into 'is eyes again.

VAN TUYL

Perhaps this is the last time you two will ever meet. Be merciful. Don't leave the poor boy with the memory of this afternoon. Give him the chance of seeing you as you are. Give him the joy of knowing what he's done for you.

RITA

[*Nervously.*] Please don' ask me — no — I do not dare —

VAN TUYL

Be a brave child! Let me send for him!

RITA

No — not tonight —

VAN TUYL

This very minute. [*Going to the door.*] Ask the gentleman to come upstairs.

THE BELLBOY

All right, sir. [*He closes the door. Van Tuyl turns to find his coat, hat and stick.*]

RITA

[*Terrified.*] You are not going!

VAN TUYL

He mustn't find me here.

RITA

[*Trembling and clinging to him.*] Ah, don' leave me — please — I am afraid —

VAN TUYL

Afraid — when you can help him? I thought you loved him, dear. [*She releases her hold on him. He offers her his hand.*] Good-bye.

RITA

[*Taking his hand.*] Good-bye.

VAN TUYL

[*Still holding hers.*] Do you forgive me, Rita?

RITA

For vhat?

VAN TUYL

[*Wistfully.*] For everything. [*With a little gasp she lifts his hand and touches it to her lips.*]

VAN TUYL

[*Deeply moved as he suddenly gathers her in his arms.*] My darling — ! Beautiful — ! Joy of men — !

RITA

[*Brokenly.*] Oh, my good frien' — [*She buries her face on his shoulder.*]

VAN TUYL

[*With infinite tenderness.*] Little bird — ! I shall hear your singing in my heart forever, and I thank you from the bottom of my soul! [*He bends over and softly kisses her hair. Then, quickly and sharply, turns and goes out the other door. Rita is left alone. She looks after him for a moment, then runs to the window and opens it. Outside the gleam and swirl of falling snow can be seen. She stands there, one hand to her throat, breathing deeply. A knock is heard at the door to the hall. She closes the window and turns. The knock is repeated, more loudly. She tries to speak, but cannot. The knock is heard a third time. She controls herself with a great effort.*]

RITA

Come! [*The door opens and Tom appears. He closes the door and stands with his back against it, looking at her. He is quite white, his hair dishevelled, his eyes wild. He is without overcoat or gloves — the snow is still on his shoulders, his hands are red with cold. His voice is strange. He moves*

and talks as though devoured by some inward flame. During the entire scene he rarely, if ever, takes his eyes away from her.]

RITA

[*With difficulty.*] You — you vant to — see me?

TOM

Yes. [*They look at each other, breathing deeply.*]

RITA

[*Unsteadily.*] Vell?

TOM

Just wait. I — I'm sort of cold.

RITA

[*Her manner changing at once.*] De fire — please — go qveeck an' varm yourself — [*Taking him by the arm and drawing him across.*] *Santi benissimi!* You are all vet! [*Glancing at his feet.*] An' your shoe — *per carita!* You 'ave valk 'ere in dis snow!

TOM

[*Oddly.*] Yes. I've been walking. All the time that you were singing there. I think I got as far as Trinity, but I don't — quite remember.

RITA

Vhat for you come out on a night so bad? An', if you mus', vit'out dat beeg t'ick coat?

TOM

[*Looking down at himself.*] My coat? I suppose I — I forgot to put it on.

RITA

Forget — ! [*With an exclamation.*] *Madonna!*

TOM

[*Again staring at her.*] I was thinking about something else. About you. I was praying for you in the twilight — in the evening — in the black and dark night —

RITA

Oh, Meestair Tom!

TOM

[*Continuing.*] I walked and prayed. And in my prayers I felt a little hand here on my arm. Some lost one offering herself, I thought. But when I looked down at the red mouth under the veil and the tawdry bonnet, my head swam. *It was you!*

RITA

[*Amazed.*] Me — ?

TOM

I heard you crying as I ran away. And I ran and ran — I don't know where — till I saw some lights and people. And then a little beggar, playing on the curb, held up her hand. And when I gave her a penny, she thanked me — *with your voice.*

RITA

No — no — you vere meestake —

TOM

Of course! And then I saw you walking by me in the streets and looking at me out of windows — hundreds of different women, but every one was you. I couldn't

move — you were so thick and close. And it began snowing, and I thanked God, because that would blot you from my sight. But no! Each snowflake was a tiny face. *Your* face. Some crowned with diamonds, some with loosened hair, some old and terrible, some sad and young. Some with your sweet lips parted and your cheeks all wet with tears. And you came and came and kept on coming. Thousands and millions of you, driving and swirling in your devil's dance by the glare of the gas-light on the corner. And not one spoke. You all just looked at me as if you wanted something — imploring — longing with your beautiful dumb eyes. And suddenly I knew! You were begging me to bring your soul to God before it was too late! And I called to you — I cried out that I would! And then you smiled and vanished, and I came here through the storm.

RITA

[*Clasping her hands.*] You poor, poor boy —

TOM

It's different now. Of course you understand. [*With emphasis.*] As man and woman, we've done with one another. Everything like that is over and forgotten — seared away. But I am still a minister of God's word and you are still a human being in mortal peril!

RITA

[*Tenderly.*] Ah, don' talk dat vay! But come — seet 'ere! You are all shaking — see! you vill catch col'! [*She tries to make him sit by fire.*]

TOM

[*Paying no attention.*] Do you know you're standing on

the brink of life or death? You must choose between them.

RITA

[*Trying to calm him.*] Yes, yes — anodder time.

TOM

No, not another time! Tonight! This very minute! Now!

RITA

[*In deep distress.*] Oh, vhy you come?

TOM

To save you, dear. Now listen! At midnight I must lead my clergy through the streets. You know, my plan to gather in the vagrants for my New Year Service. And tomorrow you go away. So this is my hour — my hour of hours! And I'll never leave you till you've given me your soul!

RITA

Ah, if you only knew 'ow —

TOM

[*Interrupting and holding up his hand.*] Listen! Don't you hear it — now — above us — in this very room?

RITA

'Ear vhat — ?

TOM

[*In a sort of rapture.*] The sound of many waters —

RITA

[*Puzzled.*] Eh?

TOM

The Voice — [*Very solemnly.*] The thunder of an angel's wings! [*A pause.*]

RITA

I 'ear de vind blow, an' my 'eart beat. Dat is all.

TOM

It's here! I feel it! [*Ecstatically.*] Oh, dear God! Dear God! You're giving me the strength to conquer her!

RITA

[*Anxiously.*] Conquair — ? [*Suddenly.*] You vant to 'urt me! Ah, don' 'urt me — please!

TOM

[*Turning to her and speaking with sudden tenderness.*] My dear, I wouldn't hurt you for the world. It's love I'm offering you — [*As she makes a quick movement.*] — no, wait, my poor child. Not the sick passion of those luxurious beasts. Not even the great pity I once knew. Not theirs, not mine, the love I bring to you tonight is God's alone!

RITA

God's love — ?

TOM

Yes, darling, His. The mighty tenderness that moves the stars, and understands when little children pray. It's ours *forever!* [*In sudden anxiety.*] Do you realize the meaning of that word?

RITA

[*Sadly.*] Your keess 'ave teach me.

TOM

[*Always staring at her.*] Little lost soul, I am ready to carry you home! Little tired heart, eager for joy! Follow me and find it in His arms!

RITA

What you mean?

TOM

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. For you come out of great tribulation and have washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb —

RITA

What is it — what you say?

TOM

[*More and more moved.*] You shall no longer hunger and thirst. For He will lead you to the living waters and the Tree of Life, and God Himself will wipe away your tears!

RITA

[*Looking at him.*] I don' — qvite on'erstan' —

TOM

I thought our meeting was the work of chance — the call of a man for his earthly mate. But in bitter shame have I learnt my error. God drew you to me, over land and sea, that I might be the engine of His Word. You are a bride — but ah! not mine — [*His voice dropping.*] — not mine!

RITA

A bride — *me?* No — no — dat is imposs'ble —

TOM

[*His eyes gleaming.*] Don't you hear the midnight cry — "Behold! the Bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet him!" Don't you see Him, coming from the wilderness like a pillar of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense? His eyes are as a flame of fire, on his head are many crowns. He wears a garment dipped in blood and on it a name is written — *Lord of Lords and King of Kings!* Hark! He is outside, knocking at your door! O Rose of Sharon — Lily of the Valley! Cease your slumber, for the hour has come!

RITA

[*Nervously.*] I do not like it vhen you talk dis vay —

TOM

[*Coming nearer as she shrinks away.*] How can you sleep when His voice is calling — "Rise up, my love, my fair one — and come away! For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone! The flowers appear on the earth, the time for the singing of birds is come! Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled — for my head is filled with dew and my locks with the drops of the night —"

RITA

[*Desperately.*] *Santa Madonna — !* What is it you say — ?

TOM

Awake, O fairest among women! Awake, and open wide the door! Awake and sing and shout and cry aloud — "My beloved is mine and His desire is towards me!"

RITA

Your eyes — dey bite me — oh, dey burn me up —

TOM

[*Breathing fast and deep as he comes nearer.*] My dear, He's tired! Don't keep Him standing there!

RITA

Meestair Tom — *Meestair Tom!*

TOM

[*Hoarsely.*] Darling, open your heart! For God's sake, let Him in!

RITA

[*In a spasm of nervous horror as he finally seizes her.*] Don' touch me — don' — don' — let me go! [*She drops writhing at his feet. He holds fast to her hands and speaks quickly, bending over her.*]

TOM

[*Changing his tone.*] So *that's* it, is it? So you're proud! You think you can close your soul against the Lamb! Well, let me tell you now that unless you repent, the day will come when your pride lies broken, shattered by His wrath! You're young and beautiful, but that won't last! Your head is burdened with the weight of gold and splendors. But, unless you pray God to forgive you, the time is near when the stench of your dead vanities will fill the world —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Let me go — *let me go* — [*She tears herself free and runs over to the fire where she crouches trembling against the wall.*]

TOM

[*With horrible intensity.*] When the kings of the earth

have sealed themselves in pleasure on your heart — when the merchants of the earth have grown fat through the abundance of your delicacies — when you have glorified yourself and lived deliciously, and all lands are drunk with the wine of your abominations — when you have said in your soul, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow — *then* will the Son of Man thrust in his sickle! *Then* will He gather your grapes and cast them down and tread them in the winepress of God's rage!

RITA

It is not true — [*A coal breaks in the grate behind her and her figure is bathed in a ruddy, flickering glow.*]

TOM

[*With a cry, covering his face as if to shut out some dreadful sight.*] Ah! No! Not that! Dear God, not that — *not that* —

RITA

[*Terrified.*] What? What you say — ?

TOM

[*Pointing at her.*] Look — ! The red light — hell is burning —

RITA

[*Beginning suddenly to cry like a frightened child.*] Oh — ! Oh — ! I am afraid!

TOM

[*Wildly.*] Afraid — ! *Afraid — ?* Miserable sinner, how can you live with that horror staring in your eyes? The vision of that dreadful day when the sun is smitten,

and the moon is blood, and the great stars reel and fall down from the sky —

RITA

I don' believe — no — no, I don' — I don' –

TOM

When the graves are broken, and the sea gives up its dead — and great and small they stand before Him and He sits in judgment —

RITA

[*Trying to interrupt him.*] Meestair Tom — jus' vait vone meenute —

TOM

[*Going on.*] Don't you hear that great Voice like a light that blinds — "I made you keeper of my vineyards. But your own vineyards you have not kept. So you shall drink from the cup of the wine of the fierceness of My wrath and be cast into the bottomless pit and the lake of fire. And there, in the midst of your eternal torment you shall hear the alleluias in the rainbow round My throne!" [*He sinks into a chair, and buries his face in his hands. A pause. Rita, who has risen, now comes nearer him.*]

RITA

[*Simply.*] I am qvite sure dis is de las' time dat ve spik togedder — de las' time dat I look upon your face. An' so I vant to tell you jus' a leetle somet'ing — an' den — vell, mebbe I can say good-bye. [*She comes a little nearer and speaks at first with some difficulty.*] You are ver' kin' to t'ink of me so much, aftair all de trouble I 'ave bring. An' I t'ank you — I shall alvays be oblige'. But, dear, you can forget me now. It is all right. Your vork is done.

TOM

What's that?

RITA

Before I meet you I did not know much vhat a voman's life should be. But now I know. You show me. An' I cannot do dose ol' t'ings any more.

TOM

[*Looking up at her.*] You don't mean — ?

RITA

[*Her eyes shining.*] I vant to make my life all good — like yours! Ah, yes, I know dat vill be 'ard, but I don' care! An' mebbe de kin' Madonna she vill 'elp me, vhen she sees me try! [*She clasps her hands, the dawn of hope in her face.*]

TOM

[*Staring at her.*] Your lips drop as the honeycomb. Your mouth is smoother than oil. But your feet go down to death, and your steps take hold on hell.

RITA

[*A little anxious.*] You don' t'ink God, 'E vill forgive me — no? [*Smiling.*] Ah, foolish vone — ! 'E vill! Did 'E not make my face so men 'ave alvays love me? Did 'E not put my voice 'ere to delight de vorld? Did 'E not give to vone poor leetle girl, who ask 'Im nodings, so much to carry dat she lose 'er vay? 'E vill not be surprise she stumble sometime. 'E vill not scol' much vhen she make meestake. 'E vill jus' smile an' keep 'Is candle burning. An' in a leetle vhile she see it, an' come 'ome!

TOM

Promise me something —

RITA

Vhat?

TOM

Take my hands and look me in the eyes and promise me never to give yourself to any man again.

RITA

Ah! I knew it! You 'ave not believe me!

TOM

[*Wiping the sweat from his forehead.*] Of course I believe you but promise me. For God's sake, promise just the same!

RITA

[*Turning away in agony.*] Ah, vhy don' you trust me? Vhy you doubt me so?

TOM

[*Loudly.*] You won't — ?

RITA

[*Turning.*] 'Ere — take my 'ands. [*He seizes them.*] 'Ow col' you are! I promise — vhat you vant I say? — never to give myself to any man again!

TOM

[*Devouring her with his eyes.*] You swear it?

RITA

Yes, I svear! Now are you satisfied?

TOM

[*Suddenly uttering a cry of pain and hideous unrest.*] Ah! [*He pushes her away from him.*]

RITA

What is it now — ?

TOM

I've just remembered that you swore before!

RITA

[*Shrinking as she understands.*] No — no!

TOM

You put your hand on my dear mother's Testament and you looked up, just as you're looking now —

RITA

[*Putting up her hands as if to ward off a blow.*] No — stop it!

TOM

And you lied, and lied! You *lied* to me —

RITA

No — don' — please — it is all diff'rent now —

TOM

Different? I don't see it. Why, it's just the same!

RITA

No — no! I tell you *I* am diff'rent! *I* 'ave change! I am going now to be good!

TOM

But can you?

RITA

Listen! I tell you 'ow I show! I vill stop singing, fin' out a convent vhere dey take me in an' — [*Suddenly.*] *Ecco!* I 'ave it! Dere are some nuns near Geneva who nurse de sick. I vill go straight from Napoli, learn 'ow to 'elp, an' vork until dis flesh fall from de bone!

TOM

You'll do that just to show me you're sincere?

RITA

[*Imploringly.*] I vill do all you vant! Yes, *anyt'ing!* Only believe me, jus' believe — or else I die!

TOM

[*Deeply moved.*] All right. I take you at your word.

RITA

[*Hardly daring to believe.*] You mean it — ?

TOM

[*Huskily, his face working.*] Yes. God bless you, dear. Good-bye. [*He turns away.*] Before I go — there's something I forgot — [*Remembering.*] Oh, yes! Your cross — your pearls. You left them at the Rectory. [*He has unfolded his handkerchief and taken from it the jewels. As he lays them on the table he sees Van Tuyl's card, left there by Signora Vannucci at the beginning of the act. He stands rigid. A moment's pause.*]

RITA

T'ank you. [*Her voice changes as she sees his face.*] What is it?

TOM

[*Trying to point.*] That card — Van Tuyl — [*He chokes suddenly.*]

RITA

[*Anxiously.*] Meestair Van Tuyl. Yes?

TOM

[*With difficulty.*] He's been here then?

RITA

[*Looking at him.*] *Si — si —*

TOM

[*Putting his hand to his throat.*] Tonight?

RITA

Yes.

TOM

[*Hardly able to contain himself.*] When?

RITA

Jus' before you come.

TOM

[*Seizing the card and crumpling it in both hands.*] Oh! What a fool I've been! What a fool! What a fool! What a blind, miserable, wretched *fool!*

RITA

What is it? Tell me! What 'as 'appen?

TOM

Why didn't I feel it as soon as I saw you in that indecent dress, with your hair unbound, and the night-light burning? Why didn't I smell it in the sickening perfume that this whole place reeks of —

RITA

What you mean? O dear Lord, what you mean?

TOM

Don't try to cheat me any more! I know what's happened in this room tonight! While I was tramping through the storm and snow, praying with my whole heart for your soul's redemption — [*Pointing to the bedroom.*] — you lay there laughing in your lover's arms.

RITA

[*Stung.*] No — no! Dat is not so, I say — not so —not so! 'E come in kin'ness, jus' because 'e feel ver' sorry for me, an' vhen 'e ask me to go back to 'im, I 'ave refuse!

TOM

What — ?

RITA

I 'ave refuse! You 'ear me? I 'ave tol' 'im "*No!*" An' 'e is great beeg man, an' on'erstan'. An' den I t'ank 'im, an' ve say good-bye.

TOM

[*Fiercely.*] You lie! Why, look at those two chairs — so close together! They look like a refusal, don't they? And those glasses — champagne —

RITA

No — no! It is qvite diff'ren'! You are all meestake —

TOM

[*More and more fiercely.*] A private orgy, planned and thought out days ahead! Your last caresses — [*He has seized the table cloth with both hands.*]

RITA

Oh, take care!

TOM

[*Between his teeth.*] A farewell debauch — [*He pulls the cloth and drags everything to the floor with a crash.*]

RITA

[*Closing her eyes.*] Oh — !

TOM

[*Turning on her.*] Now do you dare deny Van Tuyl's your lover?

RITA

[*Her eyes still closed.*] Yes! Yes! I do! I do! [*Beginning to sway a little as she speaks.*] I 'ave refuse 'im an' I tell you vhy! I t'ought it was because my 'eart 'ave change, because I vant so much to be good! But now I know dat I vas all meestake! I 'ave *not* change! My 'eart, it is *not* good! *I break vit 'im because I love anodder* —

TOM

[*Ready to kill her.*] Who is he?

RITA

[*Half-fainting, as she opens her eyes and sways towards him, holding out her arms.*] You —

TOM

[*Turning sharply as if she had struck him with a whip.*] Don't!

RITA

[*Pulling herself together.*] Forgive me —

TOM

[*Twisting his hands as if in prayer.*] Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

RITA

[*Her back to him, holding the big chair for support.*] An' now — if you don' min' — I mus' ask you — to leave me — it is almos' midnight — you 'ave your service in de church — an' I myself mus' — try to sleep a leetle — [*Turning with an enormous effort and holding out her hand with a smile.*] So good-night! I 'ope you — [*Her words die away as she sees the expression on his face. Then in a sudden paroxysm of terror.*] Vhy you look at me like dat? [*A brief pause.*] Please go avay! [*He doesn't move.*] *Go avay!*

TOM

[*Starting, wiping his forehead nervously, and trying to speak in his natural voice.*] All right. I'm going. Yes, I'm going. [*His tone deepening.*] But first there's something we must do — what is it? I forget — oh, yes, of course — of course! We must pray together — that's it! Pray for your soul and for your soul's salvation —

RITA

[*Nervously.*] No — go now! I am in God's 'ands. 'E vill take care of me. [*In quick fear, he comes towards her.*] Oh, vhat you vant?

TOM

[*Thickly.*] Come here — [*He seizes her by the arm.*] Kneel down! [*He sits on the couch and draws her down before him between his knees.*] There! That's right! Give me your hands! [*He fumbles, finds them, and holds them tight against his breast. A silence, they look into each other's eyes.*]

RITA

[*Suddenly in wild terror as she looks up at him.*] Pray! Vhy don' you pray? *Pray!* [*Half-smothered.*] *O Gésu* — [*In a silent fury of passion he has leaned forward, drawn her up to him, and crushed her in a terrible embrace.*]

TOM

[*Triumphantly.*] It's all over! I thought I came here to save you, but I didn't! It was just because I'm a man and you're a woman, and I love you, darling — I love you — I love you more than anything in the world — [*He is kissing her frantically.*]

RITA

[*Half fainting.*] Oh — !

TOM

[*Between his kisses.*] My dearest — my precious — I've never felt this way in all my life before — [*With a laugh.*] What a fool — what a fool I've been! But that's all right, it's not too late — we're here — together — and the night is ours —

RITA

[*Terrified.*] No — no!

TOM

It's ours — the whole, long splendid night — it's ours,

I tell you — every marvellous minute — why, God Himself can't rob us of it now!

RITA

[*Struggling.*] Don' — please — ! Oh, take avay your 'ands —

TOM

I won't —

RITA

It is because I love you —

TOM

[*Leaning forward to kiss her.*] Ah — ! I knew — !

RITA

[*Pushing him away from her.*] An' so, because I love you, I mus' save you from yourself!

TOM

You can't — it's too late —

RITA

Now leesten — please! It is you who 'ave teach me vhat is love! I 'ave know nodings — *nodings* — till you show me — all!

TOM

Till *I* — ? [*He breaks into a peal of jangled laughter.*]

RITA

To love a man is jus' vone big forgetting of vone's self — to feel so sorry for 'im dat it break your 'eart — to 'elp 'im vhen 'e need 'elp if it cost your life —

TOM

[*Laughing again.*] Oh, darling — you don't really think that's love — ?

RITA

I know it — now! [*With a sudden sob.*] But, oh, I learn it in such pain an' sorrow! [*In passionate entreaty.*] Don't take it from me, now dat it is mine!

TOM

Oh, nonsense! That's not love — why, that's the sort of thing *I* used to talk! [*Intoxicated.*] But I know better now! It's you who've taught me! Love isn't thinking or forgetting about anything — love's just *feeling* — it's being awfully sick and faint — as if you hadn't had anything to eat for years and years — it's —

RITA

[*Interrupting.*] Don' — ! Don' — ! You mus' not talk dat vay —

TOM

[*Moistening his lips.*] I love you —

RITA

[*In despair.*] Oh, t'ink of dat beeg lake — de lake of fire — de smoke an' torment dat you tell me of!

TOM

[*Recklessly.*] I know I'm lost! I'm done for, damned forever! But I'll have had this night, so I don't care!

RITA

But *I* care! *I care!*

TOM

[*Panting.*] I'm going to kiss you —

RITA

[*Wild with fright.*] Don' touch me — no — go back — please — keep avay —

TOM

I won't —

RITA

[*Shrinking against the sofa.*] For God's sake —

TOM

[*Seizing her in his arms.*] My darling —

RITA

[*Closing her eyes.*] I am all alone. I 'ave no strengt'. I cannot fight against you any more. But now, before it is too late, remembair — oh, remembair vhat I say! Dis is de vone big meenute in my life. De kin' of voman I vill alvays be, it is for you to say — 'ere — as ve stan' in dis room — now! [*Like a child.*] Oh, Meestair Tom! Please — please let me be good! Don' treat me like de odders 'ave! Don' make me bad — again! You are a man God send to 'elp de vorld. All right — 'elp *me!* I need you! Go avay! My 'eart, it vill go vit' you alvays, but I don' care — jus' so you let me keep my soul!

[*She stands transfigured. As she speaks he slowly releases her and sinks to his knees. His face is buried in his hands. There is a pause.*

Then, in the distance, sounds the first note of the midnight bell. As it continues, a choir of men's voices — sturdy

and sweet — strikes up far away. It gradually comes nearer. They are singing the old Lutheran hymn "Ein Feste Berg." As Tom hears them he rises unsteadily to his feet. He passes his hand over his forehead, as one awakening from a dream.]

TOM

[*In his natural voice, very formal and polite, but a little constrained.*] I beg your pardon — I must take my leave — [*As he looks about for his hat.*] My church — the choir — procession — join them as they reach the Avenue — my apologies — disturbing you at such an hour —

RITA

[*Her eyes closed, crossing herself and murmuring almost inaudibly.*] *Ave Maria gratia plena — Sancta Maria Mater Dei —*

TOM

[*At the door.*] I beg you to accept — very best wishes — coming year — my — my — good-night — good-bye —

RITA

[*As before.*] — *ora pro nobis peccatoribus nunc et in hora mortis —*

[*He is gone. Only her praying figure remains. The hymn swells to triumph as the lights fade. The scene is in darkness. For a moment the noise of the chimes and bells continues. Then it gradually dies away. The singing voices are no longer heard. A little band is playing the hymn. It is almost grotesque — so very thin and cracked and out of tune. To this music and the fading sound of the bells, the lights gradually appear. They reveal the scene set for the Epilogue.*]

THE EPILOGUE

SCENE: *The Bishop's library again. The Bishop is sitting in the red glow of the dying fire, finishing his story. His grandson is at his feet. Outside are heard the last echoes of the bells and whistles. The little street band is still playing "Ein Feste Berg" — a lamentable performance.*

THE BISHOP

. . . And that's how I remember her — standing there with her hair loosened and her eyes shut. She crossed herself. I think now she was praying. And the next thing I knew I was on the sidewalk and my choir — God bless 'em! — were swinging round the corner of Tenth Street, marching like soldiers to the same tune those wretched Germans are murdering outside there now — [*As they strike a particularly distressing dissonance.*] Ah — ! Really, that's too much! Give them a quarter, Harry, and tell them to go away. [*As the young man rises and goes to the window.*] "Ein Feste Berg" — ! How well we used to sing it at St. Giles' — ! [*He smiles and shakes his head.*]

HARRY

[*Throwing up the window and calling.*] Hi — you! That'll be enough for tonight! Catch! [*He throws out a coin. The music stops. There is silence, save for a few far-off horns.*]

THE BISHOP

[*Rousing himself as Harry returns and putting the dead violets and the handkerchief in his pocket.*] So that's what I

wanted to tell you, my boy! I came home that night a different — and I think a better man. It was the following June that your dear grandmother and I were married. Mr. Van Tuyl came all the way from Madrid just to be there and to give his niece away. They're fine people — the Van Tuyls. But your grandmother was the finest of them all. She understood the world and loved it, too. She made my life a happy one — a very happy one indeed!

HARRY

[*Boyishly.*] And — Madame Cavallini?

THE BISHOP

[*Still looking in the fire and smiling.*] She became even more famous before her retirement. But, of course, you know.

HARRY

Where is she now?

THE BISHOP

Now? I'm not sure, but I believe she's in Italy somewhere — living rather quietly. [*Wistfully.*] She and Patti are the only ones left. A wonderful career, my boy. A very great artist. I never saw her again.

HARRY

[*Patting his arm awkwardly.*] I think you're just a corker!

THE BISHOP

[*Smiling.*] Nonsense! But now I hope you understand I haven't *quite* forgotten what it feels like to be young. And although it's true I always read the *Evening Post*, I still can sympathize — and even presume to offer some occasional advice!

HARRY

I know, and I appreciate it.

THE BISHOP

[*Very solemnly.*] My dear, dear boy, unless your love is big enough to forget the whole world and yet remember Heaven, you have no right to make this girl your wife. [*A pause.*]

HARRY

[*Rising abruptly.*] Grandfather, I've been an ass! [*He puts his hands in his pockets and walks away.*]

THE BISHOP

[*Whimsically, as he wipes his glasses.*] I suppose you have, Harry — I suppose you have.

HARRY

[*Turning back again.*] I've been an ass to hesitate one single minute! However, it's all right now. Your story's settled it. Lucille and I are going to get married as soon as ever we can.

THE BISHOP

[*Thoroughly startled.*] God bless my soul! But *that* isn't why I told it to you! I wanted to get this nonsense out of your silly young head!

HARRY

[*Laughing affectionately as he stands behind the Bishop's chair and pats his shoulders.*] Never mind! You did something quite different and it's too late now to change — [*Suddenly.*] By the way, have you any engagement for tomorrow afternoon?

THE BISHOP

[*Still flustered.*] I — I can't say that I recall any at this moment —

HARRY

Then do you mind if we make one now? I want you to marry Lucille and me. How about four:thirty tomorrow?

THE BISHOP

[*Gasping.*] Four:thirty — ?

HARRY

[*At the door, shyly.*] I don't know how to say it, grandpa, but — but Lucille and I — well, we'll be grateful all our lives for what you've done for us tonight. [*He goes out quickly, his head bent.*]

THE BISHOP

Well! Well! I declare! [*He takes out his spotless handkerchief and passes it nervously over his brow. The door opens and Suzette appears, smiling brightly.*]

SUZETTE

[*Standing at the door.*] Happy New Year, grandpa!

THE BISHOP

Happy New Year, my dear!

SUZETTE

[*Coming to his chair.*] Well — ?

THE BISHOP

Suzette, I want you to order some white flowers and some black wedding-cake —

SUZETTE

[*With a wriggle of delight.*] Oh — !

THE BISHOP

[*Finishing.*] For tomorrow afternoon — four:thirty, I believe.

SUZETTE

[*Flinging her arms around his neck.*] You *duck!*

THE BISHOP

[*With some asperity.*] Don't kiss me in the ear!

SUZETTE

[*Triumphantly.*] I just *knew* Harry could get around you!

THE BISHOP

[*Drily.*] Oh, did you? Well, then, now that you two have arranged everything to suit yourselves, would you please finish reading me my paper and then go to bed? [*He leans back comfortably and closes his eyes.*]

SUZETTE

[*Going to the desk.*] Where is it? Oh, yes! Wait till I turn on the lamp — [*She does so, sits down, sighs, and unfolds the "Post."*]

THE BISHOP

Is there any foreign news?

SUZETTE

[*Carelessly.*] Oh, just some uprising in Portugal — a new Chinese loan — [*Turning the page.*] Why, Cavallini's dead!

I thought she died a long time ago, didn't you? [*She reads to herself. A slight pause.*]

THE BISHOP

What does — it say?

SUZETTE

Oh, it's just a cable. [*Reading.*] "Milan — December 30. Mme. Margherita Cavallini died this morning at her villa on the Lake of Como."

THE BISHOP

Is that — all?

SUZETTE

That's all the dispatch. There's a whole column of biography stuck on underneath. Shall I read it? [*Suddenly.*] Oh, of course! I forgot! She and Patti were your two great operatic crushes, weren't they? Well, she was born at Venice in 1841. That makes her — [*Looking up thoughtfully.*] Let me see —

THE BISHOP

Don't tell me how old she was!

SUZETTE

[*Smiling.*] All right. [*Running her eyes down the column.*] Début at Milan in 1859 — *Forze della Destine.* I never heard of it, did you? Sang prima donna roles at the Italian Opera in Paris under the direction of Rossini — brilliant figure during the last years of the Empire — success in London — hm! — brought to this country first by Strakosch — appeared as *Mignon* at the Academy of Music — [*Looking up.*] Everyone went mad over her, didn't they?

[*Resuming.*] Opera and concert tours over all the civilized globe — retired in 1889 — numerous charities — founded and endowed a home in Paris for poor girls who come to study music — in 1883 created Marchese Torrebianchi by King Umberto First — never married — that's funny, isn't it? [*Turning the page.*] Well, no matter what you say I bet she wasn't a bit more wonderful than my divine Geraldine! [*Reading headlines.*] "Anglican Congress at Detroit — City Chosen for June Conference — Federation of Churches — Further Plans." [*Bored.*] Oh dear! There's the old Conference again! [*She yawns and, looking up, notices that the Bishop's head has fallen.*] Sleepy, grandpa?

THE BISHOP

[*Rousing himself.*] I — ? No, my dear, I was just thinking — that's all.

SUZETTE

[*With affectionate impudence.*] I don't believe it! [*Yawning.*] Well, I am, anyway. May I go to bed now? There's so much to do tomorrow — and I think I've finished everything in this. [*She puts down the paper and rises.*]

THE BISHOP

Of course, my dear, of course.

SUZETTE

[*As she alights like a bird on the arm of his chair and kisses the top of his head.*] Oh, grandpa, you *are* such an old darling!

THE BISHOP

Thank you, my dear.

SUZETTE

[*At door.*] And *please* don't sit up too late, will you? And don't forget to turn off *all* the lights before you come upstairs!

THE BISHOP

[*Meekly.*] I'll do my best.

SUZETTE

Grandpa — ! [*He turns in his chair. She smiles and blows him a kiss.*] I love you! [*She runs out.*]

THE BISHOP

[*Calling after.*] The same to you, my dear. Good-night. [*He sits alone for a moment in silence, then, rising slowly, he closes the door and listens. There is no sound. Almost stealthily he goes over to the case where the phonograph records are kept, puts on his glasses, and looks over those lying on the top. Finally he selects one with much care and gingerly puts it on the machine. He starts it going. Then, switching off the lights, he returns to his armchair by the fire. The red glow from the coals lights up his face. He carefully takes from his inside pocket the dead violets and the woman's handkerchief. Looking at them, he smiles a tender little ghost of a smile and slowly sits down. The rich voice thrills through the darkness.*

" — Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! Dahin!
Möcht' ich mit dir, O mein Geliebter, ziehn!"

THE CURTAIN SOFTLY FALLS

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